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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to determine what academic and social difficulties are encountered by community college transfer students in adjusting to their transfer institutions. Data was collected from interviews with 12 students who transferred from Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) to the University of Virginia (UVA) in the fall of 1997. Students were interviewed in the spring of 1998 through in-depth, open-ended questions about the transfer process, as well as through more specific questions about the academic and social difficulties the students had experienced. Two UVA administrators were also interviewed to ascertain administrators' perceptions of the transfer process, and to compare these perceptions to those held by the students. Analysis revealed that: (1) transfer students initially felt alienated from the other students both academically and socially; (2) differences in the two institutions' academic cultures also created transitional difficulties; (3) administrators underestimated the difficulties inherent in the transition process experienced by transfer students; and (4) a positive transition required finding a niche at the transfer institution in which to make and build relationships. Participants of the study offered several suggestions for ways in which the administration could improve the transition process. (Contains 55 references and 4 appendices, including the interview protocol.) (KP)

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ED 461 395

Transition Experiences of Community College Transfer Students:

A Qualitative Study

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Curry School of Education

University of Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Doctoral Dissertation

Patricia Harrison

Center for the Study of Higher Education

University of Virginia

March 1, 1998

Executive Summary

From Community College to University:
A Study of the Transition Experience

Doctoral Dissertation
Patricia L. Harrison

One of the important functions of the community college is to provide the first two years of a liberal arts education in preparation for transfer to a college or university. Because many of the students at a community college would not otherwise be able to participate in higher education, the community college has been called the gateway to higher education (Vaughan & Templin, 1987). Although numerous studies have been done to examine the academic success of community college transfer students at their transfer institution, these studies have tended to be quantitative in nature, focusing on the *outcomes* of transfer, such as GPAs or graduation rates, rather than on the *process* of transfer. However, according to Whitt (1991), processes such as change or development, are best studied using qualitative methods. She notes that while quantitative methods predominantly employ "pre- and post-measures that only reflect the state of a person at the beginning and end [of the process]" (p. 409), qualitative studies allow the researcher to understand "what happens between the beginning and the end, [and] how the persons involved in the process perceive and feel about their experiences" (p. 409). Unfortunately, few qualitative studies have been undertaken to examine the process of transition from a community college to a four-year institution.

Given the dearth of qualitative literature on the transition process experienced by community college transfer students, this study aims to undertake research in this area and of this nature for the purposes of providing a more complete picture of the process of transfer than currently exists in the literature. Specifically, the study seeks to determine what, if any,

academic and social difficulties are encountered by community college transfer students in adjusting to their transfer institution. The bulk of the data was collected from interviews with twelve students who transferred from Piedmont Virginia Community College to the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia in the fall of 1997. Students were interviewed in the Spring of 1998, thus giving them a semester and a half to experience the transition process. The interview protocol took the form of in-depth, open-ended questions, beginning with background questions about the students' lives and general questions about transfer, and then proceeding to more specific questions about academic and social difficulties the students had experienced. In addition to interviewing community college transfer students, two University of Virginia administrators were also interviewed to ascertain the administrators' perceptions of the transfer process, and to compare these perceptions to those held by the students who are experiencing the process. The administrators were selected based on their level of involvement with transfer students.

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

One of the major functions of the community college is to prepare students for transfer to a college or university by providing the first two years of a liberal arts education. It is because of this function that the community college has been called the gateway to higher education for those students who "have the ability to succeed, but for whatever reason, are in potential danger of losing the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities" (Vaughan & Templin 1987, p. 246). Since the inception of the two-year institution, research on the performance of community college transfer students compared to that of native students at four-year institutions has provided conflicting results. Many studies, both those national in scope and those limited to a single institution, have reported that students who transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions often have difficulty adjusting to the differences they encounter in both the academic and social culture at the four-year institution. Often their adjustment difficulties result in a drop in GPA their first semester at the four-year institution, a phenomenon that Hills (1965) and others refer to as transfer shock. Other studies, however, report that community college transfer students do as well or better than native students, a phenomenon Nickens (1972) calls transfer ecstasy. Much of this disagreement, according to Palmer (1991), results from "lack of transfer rate data, collected consistently and

according to standard definitions" (p. 3). In an attempt to make sense of these conflicting data, Diaz (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of sixty-two of these conflicting studies. She found that 79% of the studies indicated that transfer shock (as defined by a drop in GPA in the first semester at the four-year institution) did typically occur, with a magnitude, on average, of one half of a grade point or less. However, she found that in 68% of the cases indicating transfer shock, students showed partial or complete recovery of the lost GPA. Diaz's study, thus, confirmed that, on average, community college transfer students do experience a number of adjustment problems, often manifested as an initial drop in GPA, but also indicated that after an initial period of adjustment to the four-year institution, these students recover the majority of their entering GPA.

As exemplified by the sixty-two studies in Diaz's meta-analysis, the majority of the research in this area involves quantifiable data such as GPA and graduation rates. But as Keely and House (1993) noted, "very little is known about specific factors that may influence the academic performance of students who transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities" (p. 2). Identifying these factors and understanding the process of transition, however, would best be accomplished using qualitative, rather than quantitative, research methods. Few such studies have been undertaken. Townsend (1993a, 1993b) has done a qualitative study in which she interviewed community college transfer students about how they perceived their adjustment to the four-year institution. Although Townsend based her research on Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987) which examines student adjustment to both the academic and social aspects of college culture, she elected to focus solely on adjustment to the academic culture because, she argued, "since many community college transfers are commuter students, they may have

fewer opportunities or be less willing to integrate themselves into a college or university's social system" (1993a, p.1). Few, if any, studies qualitatively examine the acclimation of community college transfer students to the social system of the four-year institution, and the influence that either the success or failure of this acclimation process has on the student's academic performance. According to Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994), however, in order to fully understand the transition process, researchers must examine both academic and social integration. Therefore, this study was designed to employ qualitative methods to examine the academic and social experiences of community college transfer students at a four-year institution.

Rationale for the Study

The performance of community college transfer students at four-year institutions is an important issue because of the large number of undergraduates in America served by these institutions. Nationally, approximately 5.3 million students attended community colleges in 1990, constituting 43% of American undergraduates (Watkins, 1990). By 1996 this number had increased to 5.6 million, or 45% of American undergraduates (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998). This same source predicts that by 2008 community colleges will enroll 6.1 million students. Of community college students, it has been estimated by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges that approximately 29% transfer to four-year institutions (Cohen, 1994). The Transfer Assembly, a project coordinated by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges, estimated the national transfer rate as 22.6% (Cohen, 1994). Despite the differences in

these figures, it is clear that significant numbers of students transfer from community colleges to four-year institutions each year. According to Cohen (1994), these figures demonstrate that the community college serves as an important "point of entry toward a baccalaureate degree for a sizable percentage of [undergraduates], many of whom would not have been able to matriculate in a freshman class" (p. 78) at a four-year institution. It is important, thus, to ensure that these students are able to achieve their goal of earning a baccalaureate degree.

Community colleges serve a wide variety of students, but they are especially noted for serving students who, as Cohen noted, might not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in higher education. Vaughan and Templin (1987) noted that community colleges "serve as a major avenue for upward mobility for minorities, members of lower socioeconomic groups, older adults, [and] women who wish to enter or reenter the workforce" (p. 244). This function is especially important for minorities because community colleges enroll almost half of all non-Caucasian students participating in higher education: they enroll 47% of black undergraduates, 55% of Hispanic undergraduates, and 57% of American Indian undergraduates (Cohen & Brawer, 1996; Watkins, 1990). In all, minorities constitute approximately 30% of the community college student population (Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac, 1998; Watkins, 1990). The gateway function of community colleges is also important for nontraditional students (typically defined as 25 years of age or older) who are either entering higher education for the first time or returning to higher education to update skills that have become obsolete.

In addition to serving minority and nontraditional students, community colleges are experiencing an increase in the number of traditional-aged students, due to both rising education costs and space shortages at public universities. A number of recent high school graduates are electing to pursue their first two years of higher education at a community college before transferring to a more expensive four-year institution. Collison (1991) noted that escalating tuition rates of "four-year institutions have made many high school graduates look to community colleges where they can complete the first two years of their education for a fraction of the cost of most four-year colleges" (p. A29). Collison also noted that in some states, such as California and Florida, students are attending community college after being turned away from public universities due to space shortages. In response to theses space shortages, Florida established a 2+2 program, whereby "community college students who follow a prescribed two-year program and earn an associate degree are guaranteed transfer admission into state universities" (p. A30). Thus, community colleges are seeing an increase in traditional-aged students, who, while they might be academically well-prepared, will still experience a period of transition in moving from the culture of a community college to that of a four-year institution.

Understanding the difficulties that community college transfer students experience upon matriculation to a four-year institution will help administrators, both in academic and student services, develop programs and services to help ease the transition process and to reduce the drop in GPA that usually accompanies this transition. For example, Keely and House (1993) recommended orientation sessions on such topics as dealing with large lecture courses and living on one's own. Rice (1990) reported of an

orientation course developed at Oregon State University to help transfer students with their academic and social adjustment to the university. Finally, Florida State University has developed a Transfer Student Orientation Program designed to assist new transfer students in their adjustment to life at the university (Florida State University, 1997a, 1997b). This program is operated from and located in a dormitory reserved for transfer students and staffed by Transfer Student Advisors, former transfer students themselves, who are able to plan programs and activities designed to meet the needs of transfer students. It was hoped, thus, that the community college transfer students who participated in this study would be able to provide recommendations as to ways in which four-year institutions can improve the transfer experience for future community college transfer students.

Research Questions

This study sought to understand the transition experience of students who transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. In particular, the researcher hoped to present a detailed depiction of the experience of transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. The major research question for this study, thus, was: What is the transfer experience like? Because qualitative research involves emergent design, more specific research questions could not be set forth at the outset of the study. However, the researcher believed that data to address the following subquestions would emerge from interviews of community college transfer students:

- Do community college transfer students perceive differences in culture between the community college and the four-year institution?
- If so, did these differences cause any transition difficulties for the students? And if so, how did the students overcome the transition difficulties they experienced?
- How can four-year institutions improve the transfer process for community college transfer students?

The working hypothesis for this study was that due to differences in culture between community colleges and four-year institutions, some transfer students experience transition difficulties upon transfer to a four-year institution. In concurrence with Townsend (1993a), the researcher believed that "understanding how community college transfer students view the transfer process and their academic [and social] experiences at the community college and the university is crucial to improving the enrollment and retention of community college transfer students in the four-year sector" (p. 2). The researcher further believed that it is likely that the difficulty of the transition experience varies from student to student, such that in any population of transfer students some students will transition easily while others will experience various degrees of difficulty in adjusting to their transfer institution. However, both the smooth and the difficult transfer experiences were expected be informative for the purposes of this study. Students who experienced transfer difficulties would be able to identify specific aspects of the transfer experience that served as barriers to their transition process. The experiences of students who transitioned easily, on the other hand, could provide insights into what factors increased the likelihood of a successful transition.

It was hoped that by identifying the problems encountered by community college transfer students, administrators at four-year institutions would be able to develop programs and support services to facilitate the transition process for these students. While many studies focus on ways in which community colleges can better prepare students for transfer to a four-year institution (Donovan, Schaier-Peleg & Forer, 1987; Kintzer, 1982; McGrath & Spear, 1991), this study focused on ways the receiving institutions, four-year colleges and universities, can improve the transfer process. Townsend (1993a) observes that "usually the focus is upon what the community colleges can do to improve the process or mechanics of transferring. Less frequently is attention paid to what four-year colleges and universities can also do to facilitate transfer" (p. 1).

Recently, four-year institutions have come to realize the importance of facilitating the transition process for freshman students, and have begun to offer these students effective orientation programs and support services (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Gordon, 1993). Transfer students, too, experience a transition process, which, in general, four-year institutions have not adequately addressed. As noted by Watkins (1990) the majority of four-year institutions "take a *laissez-faire* attitude toward transferring" (p. A1). This study was based on the concept that a successful transition requires efforts on the part of both the students and the receiving institution; the transfer institution must bear some of the responsibility for the successful transition of community college transfer students. One possible outcome of this study, thus, was the identification of ways in which four-year institutions can address the needs of the community college transfer student.

Conceptual Framework

The tentative conceptual framework of this study was based on a descriptive model of the transfer process that draws on both Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987) and Astin's I-E-O model (1993). This model, thus, represented a description of how the researcher, based on the literature, perceived the transfer process prior to data collection. However, the model was subject to modification based on the data collected from student participants which could either have confirmed or disconfirmed parts or all of this model.

Tinto argues that students who adapt to both the academic and social systems of their institution tend to persist to graduation (as opposed to departing or dropping out). In this model, the outcome of interest was adjustment to both the academic and social systems of the transfer institution, rather than retention or attrition as in Tinto's model. The model for this study paralleled Astin's I-E-O model in which I stands for inputs, E stands for environment, and O stands for outcomes. In this model, the inputs, as in Tinto's model, included family background, level of academic preparation, and natural skills and abilities. The environmental variables were divided into two categories. The first category of environmental variables consisted of differences between the cultures of the community college and the four-year institution that might have caused difficulties for some transfer students such as faculty pedagogy, availability of faculty outside the classroom, level of computer proficiency required, co-curricular activities available, and ease of identifying and integrating into a peer group. The variables in the above list represented supposition on the part of the researcher. Any of these variables might or

might not have been confirmed by study participants, who might have furthermore, suggested additional variables. This first group of variables was influenced by the second group of environmental variables, the level and type of institutional programs and support services for transfer students, as well as by the quality of such programs. The importance of this interaction is based on the concept that the responsibility for a successful transition rests with both the students and the institution. The students must make efforts to adjust to the four-year institution, but the institution must also provide support services that facilitate this transition. The outcome for this model was overall adjustment as measured by progress towards graduation, self-reported intent to graduate, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989), and self-reported degree of satisfaction with the college experience at the transfer institution.

Overall Design

The population for this study consisted of students who transferred from a community college to a state university in the same town in the fall of 1997. The community college will be referred to as Local Community College (LCC) and the university will be referred to as State University (SU). Data were gathered by qualitative methodologies, primarily by in-depth, open-ended interviews with community college transfer students who recently experienced the transfer process. Twelve students were selected from among the pool of former LCC students who were attending SU on a full-time basis.

Administrators who oversee the transfer process at the transfer institution were also interviewed to obtain information on the institutional programs and support services currently in place, as well as to ascertain how the administrators' perceptions of the transfer process compared to those of the students.

Data obtained from student interviews were triangulated by administration of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), (Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1986, 1989), an instrument designed to measure student adjustment to college. Data obtained from interviewing administrators were triangulated by observations of several Transfer Student Orientation activities at SU in the fall of 1997. As the orientation is designed by the administration of the transfer institution, it reflected the administration's perception of the transfer process.

Expected Outcomes

The researcher expected to find that many students who transfer to a four-year institution from a community college encounter a number of difficulties in both academic and social adjustment to their transfer institution resulting from differences in culture between community colleges and four-year institutions. Academically, it was expected that students would encounter problems resulting from differences in class size, teaching style of the faculty, accessibility of the faculty, and classroom atmosphere. Socially, it was expected that students would find it difficult to establish a peer group as native students had already established peer groups during their freshman transition. Additionally, the social adjustment of community college transfer students was expected

to be complicated for many transfer students by work and family responsibilities that pulled them away from campus life. It was expected, however, that some of the participants in the study would report a relatively smooth transition process. By comparing their experiences to those of the students who had difficulties, the researcher hoped to understand more clearly the transition process and provide suggestions for improving this process for all transfer students.

The researcher hoped to portray a rich description of the transfer experience that detailed both the negative and positive aspects of this process. Based on the belief that the transfer institution, as well as the student, bears responsibility for a successful transition process, the researcher also hoped to suggest ways in which administrators at four-year institutions can improve the transition process. Finally, the researcher expected to find that, while the transition process is a daunting one, transfer students, with persistence and a conscientious effort to become involved at the transfer institution, can and do become integrated into the transfer institution, and have as rich a collegiate experience as native students at the institution.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Quantitative Studies: Academic Performance of Community College Transfer Students

Numerous studies exist that examine the academic performance of community college transfer students, the majority of them quantitative in design, measuring academic success by GPA and graduation rates. These studies focus on the *outcome* rather than the *process* of transfer. As Laanan (1996) noted, "few [studies] have focused on the social and psychological adjustment process" of community college transfer students (p. 71). In large part, the aforementioned quantitative studies document the phenomenon of transfer shock, a term coined by Hills (1965) and defined as a drop in GPA upon transfer to a four year institution, typically followed by partial or complete recovery of GPA as the student proceeds towards graduation. Hills reviewed more than 20 studies on the performance of community college transfer students at their transfer institution, including "46 sets of data relevant to the question of transfer shock. Of these, 44 revealed [transfer] shock. Clearly [he concluded], it is a most prevalent occurrence that [community college] transfer students suffer an appreciable loss in their level of grades when they transfer" (p. 209). Since Hills's seminal work on transfer shock, many other researchers have documented this phenomenon in both single-institution and multiple-institution studies. In 1965, Knoell and Medsker "traced 7,243 students who transferred to 434 four-year institutions

in ten states in the fall of 1960" (in Nolan & Hall, 1978, p. 544). They found minimal amounts of transfer shock with consistent increases in GPA with each semester. Nolan and Hall (1978), in a study of community college transfer students from a West Virginia community college, found evidence of transfer shock with "an average drop in GPA of more than a quarter of a letter grade" (p. 546) However, these researchers also noted subsequent recovery such that "by the time transfer students had completed at least 30 additional semester hours, their GPAs were almost identical to those of upper division native students ... indicat[ing] consistent academic performance after adjusting to the new environment of the four year college" (p. 546).

Despite the evidence of transfer shock in these and other studies, Nickens (1972) questioned whether transfer shock existed. In a study comparing the academic performance of Florida State University native students to Florida State University community college transfer students, Nickens found "no significant difference ... between transfer students' first term FSU GPA and native students' first term junior year GPA" (p. 6). Nickens acknowledged that the transfer student's GPA had decreased from their junior college GPA, but argued that the above finding implies that " transfer students at FSU were performing as well as they should be expected to perform had they come to FSU as freshmen" (p. 6). Nickens coined the term transfer ecstasy to describe this phenomenon, calling into question the results from the majority of transfer studies.

More recent studies, however, continue to document the phenomenon of transfer shock. Keeley and House (1993) studied students at Northern Illinois University who had transferred from either community colleges or other four-year institutions. They found that the average incoming transfer student GPA of 3.099 fell to 2.764 after the first

semester. However, by the end of the fourth semester at Northern Illinois University, the GPA had risen to 3.015. Keeley and House concluded that "clearly, a great deal of adjustment had taken place from the students' first to fourth semesters at Northern as reflected in their academic performance" (p. 4). They also noted that transfers from Illinois community colleges "generally showed a higher degree of transfer shock than did transfers from all other institutions" (p. 5), a group that included large public universities, small liberal arts colleges, and out-of-state community colleges. Other studies reporting transfer shock include Slark and Bateman (1983), Baratta and Apodaca (1988), and Sleight (1990). Townsend, McNerny and Arnold (1993), in studying students transferring from a suburban community college to a selective urban university, divided the students into those who transferred with a GPA of 2.5 or better, and those with a GPA of less than 2.5. They found that "students who entered with a GPA of 2.5 or more were able to maintain a 2.3 at the university, whereas as those who entered with less than a 2.5 had, on average, a university GPA of 1.9 " (p. 433). Thus, one group evidenced minimal transfer shock, while the other group evidenced significant transfer shock.

Because of conflicting information as to whether transfer shock exists, Diaz (1992) performed a meta-analysis of 62 studies that examined the academic performance of community college transfer students, the results of which ranged from transfer shock to transfer ecstasy. Diaz argued the need for the meta-analysis because "drawing meaningful conclusions from these studies is complicated by such methodological problems as differences in times, geographical regions, type of institutions and actual measurement of success criteria" (p. 280). Of the 62 studies in the meta-analysis, 49 studies reported transfer shock, and13 reported no change or increase in GPA (transfer

ecstasy). Diaz's analysis determined that "community college transfer students in 79% of studies experience transfer shock ... [with] the majority of GPA changes involv[ing] one half of a grade point or less" (p. 285). Further, in 68% of the studies, community college transfer students achieved complete or nearly complete recovery of the community college GPA by graduation. Diaz's study, thus, confirmed that on average community college transfer students tend to experience an initial drop in GPA but subsequently recover to levels comparable to their entering GPA.

Qualitative Studies: The Transition Experience

As mentioned above, the majority of studies on community college transfer students are quantitative in nature and focus on *outcomes* of the transfer process (average GPA and graduation rates), rather than the *process* of transition that ultimately results in the GPA or graduation rate. While some studies purport to examine factors involved in the persistence of community college transfer students (Anglin, College, Davis & Mooradian, 1993; Gebel, 1995; Palmer, 1987), these studies are largely quantitative in nature, usually involving surveys that examine age, gender, ethnicity, number of credits completed at the community college, and enrollment-related variables such as delayed entry into postsecondary education, non-continuous enrollment, and part-time enrollment. Whitt (1991), however, notes that "studies of processes such as change or development over time" (p. 409) are best studied using qualitative methods.

Unfortunately, few studies exist that use qualitative methods to study the process of transition for community college transfer students. Williams (1973) interviewed five

community college transfer students attending one of four large universities in the Los Angeles area. Each of the five "reported problems adjusting to the new environment" (p. 320) at the four year institution. While the community college prepared them well for the "academic rigors and red tape" (p. 321) of the four year institutions, the students reported that "the community college had not adequately prepared them to fend for themselves" (p. 320), describing the community college environment as "protective, safe, [and] predictable" (p. 320). Furthermore, one student reported being surprised by the "mass efficiency of the university's large group instruction, very effective in the transfer of information almost intravenously, but providing almost no tasting or sampling" (p. 321). Finally, the five students reported that "counselors or academic advisors were generally either inaccessible, unpredictable or ill-informed" (p. 320).

After Williams's 1973 study, there is a gap in the literature until Townsend (1993a, 1993b) undertook a qualitative study of nine urban community college transfer students at a private urban university to examine academic factors at a four-year institution that enhance or hinder the transfer process. Townsend worked from the premise that transition difficulties result from differences in academic culture and norms between community colleges and four-year institutions. Students in her study reported unwillingness of faculty to take questions in class and provide help outside class, especially for those students with academic deficiencies. In contrast, community college transfer students described "community college teaching practices that reflected sensitivity to a variety of educational backgrounds" (p. 3). Community college transfer students also noted that "the competitive nature of the university made students reluctant to help one another academically" (p. 4). In contrast, students reported working together

both in and out of class at the community college (1993b). Townsend concluded that "the community college transfer student who succeeds at the university is a fairly self-reliant student able to survive with minimal institutional help" (1993a, p.11). Finally, Townsend expressed disappointment that instead of citing the university for its competitive, sink or swim atmosphere, the community college is cited by many (Dougherty, 1992; Karabel, 1972; McGrath & Spear, 1991), *including* the students in her study, for not being competitive enough. Is not, she asked, the community college atmosphere of collaboration, cooperation, and support between faculty and students the better teaching and learning methodology?

The Community College Culture

As noted by Townsend (1993a, 1993b), an important reason why transfer from a community college to a four-year institution is difficult for many students is due to the difference in culture between the two types of institutions. Community colleges differ from four-year institutions in mission, curricula, faculty characteristics, and student population. Laanan (1996) underscored these differences noting the difference in "size, location, difficulty of curriculum, and competition among students" (p. 69).

Because of the multiple missions of the community college, these institutions offer a variety of curricula including college parallel education, vocational/technical education, developmental education, and community (non-credit) education. The variety of curricula results in a student population of great diversity. Cohen and Brawer (1996) noted that the "community college serves a broader sector of the local population than

does any other institution of higher education" (p.57). Community college students tend to be part-time students who work either part-time or full-time jobs, and who tend to belong to the lower socioeconomic strata of society. Cohen and Brawer (1996) reported that in the 1989-90 academic year, only 6% of students at four-year institutions came from the bottom SES quartile, compared to 56.4% from the top SES quartile. For community colleges, these numbers were 18.5% from the bottom SES quartile, compared to 30.3% from top SES quartile. In addition, community college students tend to exhibit lower academic skill levels. Cohen and Brawer (1996) reported that, compared to the national average ACT score of 20.6, community college students averaged 17.0. Finally, community colleges enroll a high percentage of minority students: in 1991, community colleges enrolled 39% of the total enrollment in American higher education, but 47% of ethnic minorities (Cohen & Brawer, 1996).

Faculty at community colleges also differ from those at four-year institutions. Because community colleges emphasize teaching rather than research or scholarship, faculty are usually not trained in or rewarded for such activities. Instead, they focus their energies on teaching. Roueche and Baker (1987) noted that, unlike some faculty at four-year institutions, community college faculty "wish to spend more time, rather than less time in the classroom with students" (p. 148). Most embrace student-centered teaching and create a caring class environment. They have high expectations but create a supportive environment that "allows students the freedom to be creative, to try, to fail, to succeed" (p. 148). Community college faculty are often facilitated in this effort by smaller classes than are typically found at a four-year institution. Cohen and Brawer

(1996) reported that, on average, one third of the classes at community colleges have 10-19 students, while another third has 20-29 students.

Because community college students tend to be less academically prepared than four-year college students, faculty frequently encounter students who either have not been taught or have not mastered skills needed to succeed in the faculty member's class. Undaunted, many faculty members work with the student to bring him or her up to speed. Townsend (1993a) confirmed this assertion in noting a difference in student expectation on the part of the faculty at community colleges compared to four-year institutions. At a community college, if a student has difficulty, the faculty member works with the student to help him or her succeed. At the university, by contrast, "it is the student's responsibility to correct any deficiencies in academic preparation, not the faculty member's" (p. 12). Thus, community college faculty are generally more accessible, both inside and outside of class.

In addition, many community college faculty see their students as individuals, and try to make each student feel he/she is important. Often, they develop a good rapport with and show personal interest in the students by learning their names and interests. In addition, counseling and advising of the student is approached from a holistic perspective at the community college. Rather than focusing on academic advising, counselors and advisors are concerned with all aspects of the student's life and development. Laanan (1996) described the community college as a "protected ... environment that provides a challenging academic experience, close interactions with faculty, academic counselors, and fellow ... students" (p. 80), and where students receive special attention. Thus, because of these significant differences between the culture of a community college and a

four-year institution, it is possible that community college students might have difficulties adjusting to their transfer institutions.

Transition to College

The transition experienced by students who transfer from a community college to a four-year institution is similar in many ways to the transition experienced by freshman at colleges and universities. Therefore, some aspects of the literature on freshman transition can be applied to the transition experience of community college transfer students. Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg and Jalomo (1993a) noted that in general, transition is a complex process,

> the nature and dynamics [of which] vary according to the student's social, family, and educational background; personality; educational and occupational orientations and aspirations; the nature and mission of the institution being attended; the kinds of peers, faculty, and staff members encountered; the purpose and nature of those encounters, and the interactions of all these variables. The process is a highly interrelated, web-like series of family, interpersonal, academic and organizational pulls and pushes that shape student learning ... and persistence. (p. 5)

Terenzini et al. (1993b) noted that for first generation students, "college attendance involves two transitions: an educational one and a cultural one" (p. 4). The former involves adapting to the social and academic system of the institution, a process that traditional students also experience. The latter process involves a "cultural transition as they enter an academic and social context quite different from the one in which they have grown up" (p. 4). While Terenzini et al. (1993b) were referring to first generation students whose family background had not acculturated them to the norms and lingo of

higher education, the same statement can be applied to community college transfer students, who are moving from the culture of a community college to the quite different culture of a four-year institution. London's (in Terenzini et al., 1993b) description of college attendance for first generation students can also be applied to transfer students. He noted that because "[college attendance or transfer] involves not just gain but loss- most of all loss of a familiar past, including a past self- ... we can begin to understand the attendant periods of confusion, conflict, isolation, and even anguish that first generation [or transfer] students experience" (p. 4). Other assertions by Terenzini et al. (1993a, 1993b) regarding transition can also be applied to community college transfer students [noted by brackets]. They noted that nontraditional [or transfer] students must "reconcile and balance competing demands of work, family, culture, and school. Most traditional [native] students will have to deal with one or maybe two of these demands, but *very* few confront all four simultaneously" (p.4). Terenzini et al. also noted that friends from the past can confound the transition process: "nonacademic friends [friends still at the community college] often complicate the transition by anchoring students to old networks of friends and patterns of behavior rather than allowing them to explore and learn about the new college environment" (p.5). Finally, Terenzini et al. noted the importance of validating experiences for a successful transition: "both academically and socially, new students need reassurance. They need evidence that they can do college level work, that their ideas have value, and that they are worthy of respect" (1993b, p. 6). Validation can come from faculty, peers, or family. According to Terenzini et al. (1993b), "for nontraditional [transfer] students, early validating experiences are especially important

since these students have a smaller warehouse of academic successes to sustain them" (p. 10).

While community college transfer students may confront many of the same issues confronted by college freshman during the transition process (discovering abilities and personal talents, honing survival skills, learning self-discipline), not all freshman issues are relevant to the transfer experience. Jacobs, Busby and Leath (1992) noted that "assumptions generally held about freshman students may not hold true for transfer students" (p. 91). They further noted that "entering freshman students are different from transfer students, since they, unlike their freshman counterparts have had at least one other college experience" (p. 92). Additionally, many community college transfer students have lived on their own already, and experienced autonomy and responsibility; many are older and have already established their identity. Jacobs et al. (1992) reported that transfer students in their study "generally felt ready for college, having taken classes at a two-year college, and thus, need less career counseling and coping skills for general college apprehension" (p. 96), but were concerned with "the transition from one institution to another, ... [as well as] financial aid and work opportunities" (p. 97). Laanan (1996) noted that specific factors to which community college transfer students need to adjust include "increased academic demands, large lecture classes, relocation to a new environment, coping with ... services not provided them (such as an assigned faculty advisor)" (p. 81). Laanan also noted that "making the adjustment from an environment of small classes where instructors know them by name to an environment where class sizes average 100-plus students impedes the [community college transfer students'] adjustment process" (p. 80). Dougherty (1992) observed that transfer students often encounter

problems with financial aid, having exhausted their eligibility during three to four years at a community college, with social integration because they frequently work and live off-campus, and with academic integration because of poor academic preparation at the community college. Laanan (1996) summarized the transition process by observing that "because of the unique characteristics of their community college experience, which focuses on student-centered learning and a more personal environment, community college transfer students will" (p. 82) often have difficulty adjusting to their transfer institution.

College Persistence

Although this study will focus on the process of transition, the goal of the transition process is ultimately to graduate from the transfer institution with a baccalaureate degree. Therefore, retention is a significant underlying issue in the transition process. Tinto (1987) proposed a theory of individual departure to explain factors involved in either persistence or attrition of college students. Tinto's model holds that the decision to remain or depart is impacted by:

- pre-entry attributes- family background, academic preparation, natural abilities
- institutional experiences- both formal and informal academic and social experiences
- the student's goals and commitments- in regard to both education in general, and the institution in particular

The degree of social and academic integration is influenced by the interaction between these three categories of variables, and results in the decision to stay or leave. Tinto

(1987) noted that "negative or malintegrative experiences serve to weaken intentions and commitments, especially commitment to the institution, and thereby enhance the likelihood of leaving" (p. 115). Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994), confirmed Tinto's assertion regarding academic and social integration. In a study examining reasons for college persistence, they suggested that retention is determined by a combination of academic adjustment, social adjustment, and emotional adjustment. Their study of students at a large public university found that "adjustment and integration into the social fabric of the campus life play a role at least as important as academic factors in student retention" (p. 286).

Tinto (1988) acknowledged that, while his theory is based on high school graduates going to college, transfer students "are [also] likely to experience problems of separation, transition and incorporation. But they may do so in ways that may be qualitatively different from those experienced by young high school graduates" (p. 452). He further noted that few schools offer orientation programs that are adequate to their needs, "yet their needs may be as great as, if not greater, than those for more youthful entrants from high school" (p. 452). With that caveat in mind, Tinto (1988) argued that transition involves 3 stages:

1. separation: students are required to "disassociate themselves … from membership in past communities, most typically those associated with high school and place of residence" (p.443). In this study, the past community will be the community college, and the present community will be the transfer institution.
2. transition: students experience a "period of passage… between associations of the past and hoped for associations with communities of the present" (p. 444).

Because the students are neither bound to the past nor the present, they experience feelings of stress, sense of loss, and bewilderment. Tinto notes that "the scope of the transition stage…depends on... the degree of difference between the norms and patterns of behavior of the past and those required for incorporation into the life of the [transfer] college" (p. 445). Laanan (1996), confirms this statement, stressing that "the greater dissimilarity between a student's previous experiences (familiar institutional culture at the two-year college) and present situation (unfamiliar institutional culture at the four-year institution), the greater the adjustment that will be required" (p. 81).

3. incorporation: students take on new patterns of interaction and full membership in the group. Tinto notes that unlike other societal transitions, students transitioning to college lack group support. According to Tinto, "new students are left to make their way through the maze of institutional life. They ... have to 'learn the ropes' of college life largely on their own. Not all individuals …have that capacity… Without assistance, many are unable to establish competent intellectual and social membership in the communities of the college" (p. 446-447). Should incorporation fail, the student may leave college.

Despite the relevance of Tinto's theory to the transfer process, it is important to note that many community college students leave the community college or their subsequent transfer institution for reasons unrelated to academic performance or social integration. In a 1964 study, Knoell and Medsker found that of the 29% of the community college transfer students in their study who dropped out, 19% withdrew as a result of personal rather than academic reasons. Townsend (1993a) reported that of nine

community college transfer students in her study who left the university before graduating, three cited financial reasons and three transferred to a university to pursue a curriculum not offered at their first transfer institution. Anglin, College, Davis & Mooradian (1993) found that many transfer students in their study dropped out with significantly higher GPAs and more academic hours completed than native dropouts, suggesting that "transfer students have more external factors competing with academic study than native students" (p. 16). Cohen and Brawer (1996) confirmed the above assertions, noting that community college students are often pulled out of school by factors beyond the control of the institution such as work commitments, health problems, lack of adequate child care, and financial difficulties. These factors would most likely continue to impact the student's life at the transfer institution. Thus, although Tinto's retention theory is relevant to the experience of community college transfer students, it is important to bear in mind that these students often leave school for reasons unrelated to their transfer experience.

Involvement in College Life

An important part of a successful transition includes becoming involved at the four-year institution. Astin's theory of student involvement originated from a study "aimed at identifying factors in the college environment that significantly affect the student's persistence in college" (1985, p. 144). Astin found that each factor that related in either a positive or negative way to a student's persistence in college was also related

to student involvement. Terenzini et al. (1993a) confirmed Astin's assertion, noting that "if students become involved in one or another aspect of the new college ... persistence [is] significantly increased" (p. 14). Thus, the "persister-dropout phenomenon provides an ideal paradigm for studying student involvement. If we conceive of involvement along a continuum, the act of dropping out can be viewed as the ultimate form of noninvolvement" (Astin, 1985, p. 147).

Astin (1985) defined involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 134). He noted that the "amount of learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program" (p. 136). As noted above, in addition to enhancing learning and development, involvement also has implications for retention. Factors that increase involvement and thus increase retention include residence on campus, joining a fraternity or sorority, taking part in co-curricular activities, sports, honor programs, or ROTC, and participation in a professor's research projects. Astin noted that part-time jobs off campus negatively impacted retention, whereas part-time jobs on campus increased retention due to "contact with other students, professors, and college staff" (p. 145). Because involvement strongly correlates with persistence, community college transfer students who become involved at the transfer institution should more easily adjust to their transfer institution.

Literature on college involvement indicates that persistence in college is greater among students who become involved in college life. While decisions related to persistence for community college transfer students are often complicated by life pressures outside of college life such as family and employment responsibilities, this study postulated that a

successful transition from a community college to a four-year college includes involvement in one or more aspects of college life at the transfer institution.

Conclusion

Numerous studies on the academic performance of community college transfer students have been undertaken since the 1960s when community colleges became a popular means of entering higher education. Based on the findings of these quantitative studies, it is well documented that community college transfer students typically experience a drop in GPA upon transfer to a four-year institution, but usually exhibit a partial or full recovery of the GPA by graduation. However, these quantitative studies focus on the outcomes of the transfer process (GPA or persistence to graduation) rather than the transition process itself. Processes such as adjustment or transition are best studied using qualitative research methods. Few studies on community college transfer students, however, are qualitative in nature. This study sought to contribute to the literature on community college transfer students by providing a detailed account of the transfer experience based on qualitative interviews of students who have experienced the transfer process.

This study based many of its hypotheses on general knowledge from the literature on community college culture. The community college literature documents the significant differences between the culture of community colleges and four-year institutions, including such important aspects of institutional culture as institutional mission, curricula, faculty characteristics, and student population. Thus, this study

postulated that community college students who transfer to four-year institutions are required to adapt to a culture different from the one they experienced at a community college. Therefore, this study sought also to contribute to the literature by confirming or disconfirming the importance of cultural differences between community colleges and four-year institutions in a successful transition experience.

Finally, this study contributed to the literature by detailing specific barriers that some community college transfer students experience during the transfer process. This information will allow administrators at transfer institutions to develop programs and support services, or to enhance current programs and support services, designed to improve the transition experience for community college transfer students.

Next, Chapter Three presents a detailed discussion of the design and methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overall Design

This research project examined the transfer experience of students who transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. It was based on a conceptual framework that integrated certain aspects of Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987) and Astin's I-E-O model (1993). The researcher created a tentative model based on those two works (see Figure 1) that represented how the researcher perceived the process of transfer from a community college to a four-year institution prior to data collection. The initial interview questions for each student participant were based on the precepts put forth by the model, but the researcher was attentive to data from student participants that either supplemented or contradicted the tentative model. Thus, the model was subject to modification or elimination altogether based on the findings of the study.

In creating the tentative model, the researcher incorporated the input variables and the importance of both social and academic integration from Tinto (1987). The remainder of the model derived from Astin's I-E-O model in which outcome is determined by both input and environmental characteristics. According to this model:

> *inputs* refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution; *environment* refers to various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed; and *outcomes* "refers to the student's characteristics *after* exposure to the environment... The basic purpose of the model is to assess the impact of various

> environmental experiences by determining whether the students grow or change differently under varying environmental conditions. (Astin, 1993, p. 7)

The inputs of the tentative model, as in Tinto's model, included family background, level of academic preparation, and natural skills and abilities. The environmental variables were differences between the cultures of the community college and the four-year institution that might have caused problems for transfer students such as faculty pedagogy, availability of faculty outside the classroom, level of computer proficiency required, co-curricular activities available, and ease of identifying and integrating into a peer group.

This first group of environmental variables were thought to be influenced by the presence or absence of institutional programs and support services, as well as by the quality of such programs. This interaction was based on the concept that the responsibility for a successful transition rests with both the student and the institution. The student must make efforts to adjust to the four-year institution, but the institution must also provide support services that facilitate this transition.

The outcome for this model was a successful transition to the four-year institution as could be measured by progress towards graduation, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (Baker & Siryk, 1989), self-reported intent to graduate, and self-reported degree of satisfaction with the college experience at the transfer institution. While the researcher administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, as well as asked student participants about their progress towards graduation and their satisfaction with their college experience at the transfer institution, the majority of this study focused on the experience of transfer, and therefore the

researcher was most concerned with the congruence between the environmental variables posited by the tentative model and those reported by the students.

The major goal of this study was to create a detailed description of the process of transfer as experienced by students transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. Subthemes that were thought might emerge from the data include:

- Do community college transfer students perceive differences in culture between the community college and the four-year institution?
- If so, did these differences cause any transition difficulties for the students? And if so, how did the students overcome the transition difficulties they experienced?
- How can four-year institutions improve the transfer process for community college transfer students?

It was hoped that by better understanding the transfer experience, four-year institutions could provide improved forms of institutional support to community college transfer students, as well as familiarize both academic and student affairs personnel with the needs of these students, in order to facilitate the transfer experience.

It should be noted that, because qualitative studies are inductive rather than deductive, a flexible research design and methodology was required. Whitt (1991) noted that "the qualitative researcher cannot specify in advance all data sources or interview questions, or even a complete research plan" (p. 410). She noted that "the emergence of information about the phenomena guides what further" (p. 410) data collection and analysis must be undertaken. Thus, changes in the research methodology were expected to occur as the study progressed.

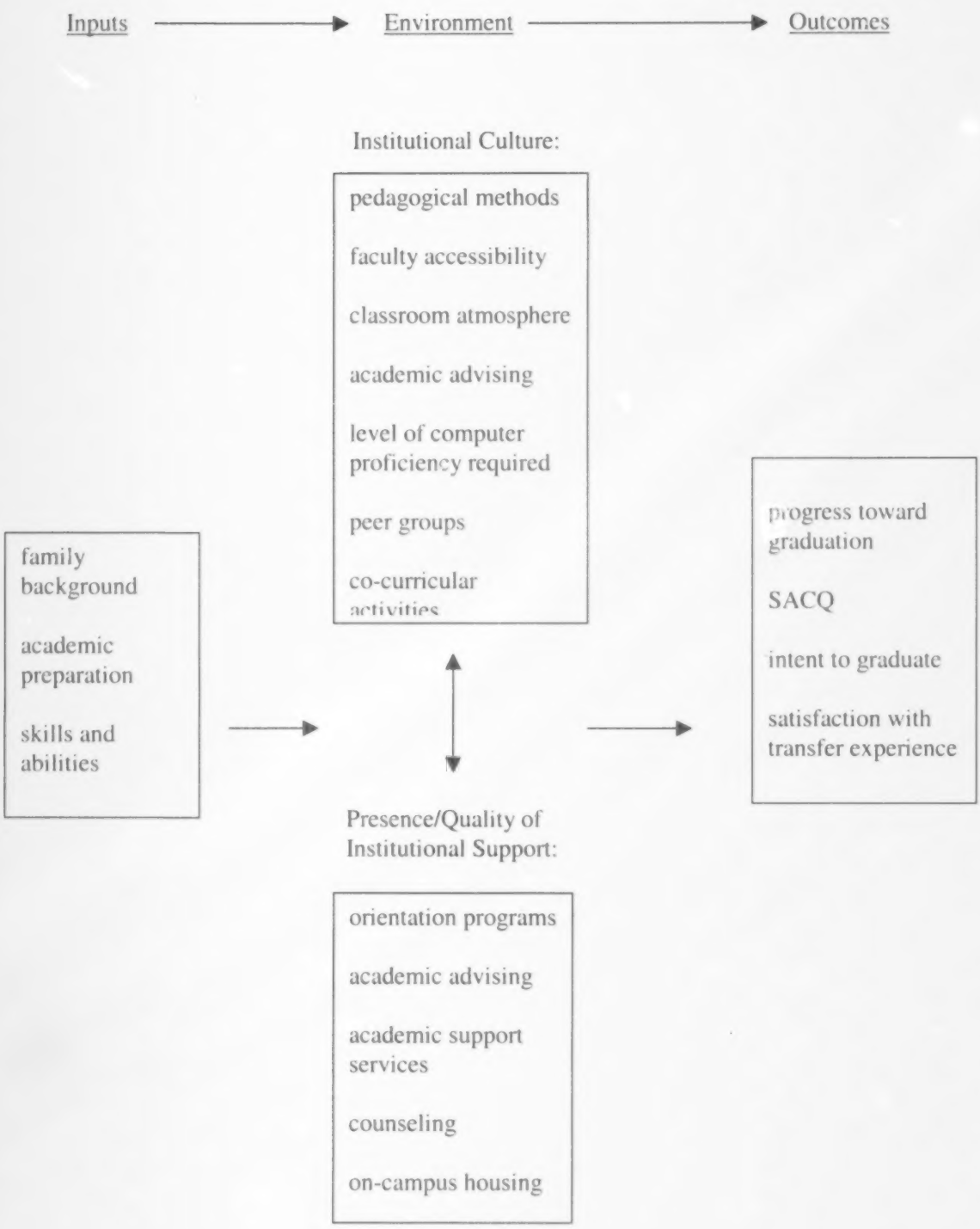

Figure 1. Tentative Model for the Transfer Process

Research Methodology

This project employed primarily qualitative methods to elicit answers to the research questions. As mentioned previously, studying a process such as transition is best accomplished using qualitative research methods (Whitt, 1991). Whitt explained that "studies of process ask how something happens and portray the dynamics of action and change, including the perceptions, experiences, and interactions of people involved in the process" (p. 409). She argued that studies of process are not suited to quantitative methods which predominantly use "pre- and post-measures that only reflect the state of a person or program at the beginning and the end [of the process]" (p. 409). Qualitative studies, by contrast, allow the researcher to understand "what happens *between* the beginning and the end, [and] how the persons involved in the process perceive and feel about their experiences" (p. 409). Kuh and Andreas (1991) noted that while student behavior is represented by *numbers* in quantitative studies, it is represented by *words* in qualitative studies, thus presenting a fuller picture of the process in question "than what is produced using questionnaires and surveys" (p. 402). Another benefit of using qualitative methods noted by Kuh and Andreas (1991) is that interviews or observations often produce "results [that] challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about student life" (p. 402).

Thus, in order to strive for an understanding of the process of transition, twelve community college transfer students were interviewed about their transition experiences in transferring to a four-year college. These students were also given the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), as a means of triangulating data from the

interviews. In addition, two administrators who have interactions with community college transfer students were interviewed in order to compare the perceptions of transfer held by administrators at the transfer institution to those of the students experiencing the process. Triangulation of this data came from observations of the Transfer Student Orientation Program at the transfer institution.

Context of the Study

The students who were interviewed were selected from LCC students who transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences at SU in the fall of 1997. LCC is a suburban, non-residential community college of approximately 4100 students which is located on the outskirts of the town in which SU is located. It serves several of the counties surrounding this town. The mean age of LCC students is 31 (Director of Institutional Research, LCC, personal communication, November 24, 1998). The information on the mean income of students attending LCC was unavailable (Director of Institutional Research, LCC, personal communication, November 24, 1998). SU is a public, residential four-year institution typified by students of traditional age who attend full-time for eight semesters and live predominantly on or near campus. In the fall of 1997, total enrollment at SU was 18,417, total undergraduate enrollment was 12,296, and total undergraduate enrollment in the College of Arts and Sciences was 9,164 (SU Office of Institutional Research, 1998). The average age of undergraduate students at SU was 19.6, and only 2% of undergraduates were over the age of 25. Forty-nine percent of all

undergraduates live in university housing, but *all* first-year students are required to live in university housing. In the fall of 1997, enrollment of transfer students in the College of Arts and Sciences totaled 453, or 5% of the CLAS student body. The students at SU tend to come from families of middle to high socioeconomic status. The median parental income of first-year students in the fall of 1995 was $87,800 and the mean parental income in that same group was $125,300. While similar information was not available for LCC students, in general these students came from families of lower socioeconomic status.

Gaining Access to and Selecting Participants

Because the majority of the data for this study came from student interviews, gaining access to participants was an important issue. The researcher benefited greatly from the help of the transfer counselor at LCC who provided the researcher with a list of names of students who transferred from LCC to the College of Arts and Sciences at SU in the fall of 1997. The researcher then sent a letter to each potential participant explaining the nature of the study and asking him/her to consider participating in the study. The letter was followed by either a phone call or an e-mail message in which the researcher asked the student if she/he was interested in participating in the study. Students were interviewed in the spring of 1998, thus giving the students a semester to experience the transition process.

Student participants were selected by purposeful sampling, a qualitative research technique designed "to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the

questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). The researcher wished the pool of participants to include a mixture of males and females, as well as a mixture of traditional-aged college students (18-24 years old) and nontraditional-aged students (25 years and older). The researcher contacted a mixture of male and female students, as well as a mixture of traditional and nontraditional students until a group of twelve participants was obtained that was mixed in gender and age. Differences in gender were readily apparent from the names on the list, and the counselor had made notations on the list that discriminated between the traditional and nontraditional students.

Because one goal of this study was to help four-year institutions improve the transfer process, many of the transfer students contacted were eager to participate. However, some transfer students contacted by the researcher chose not to participate in the study, citing either lack of interest or lack of time. The researcher wonders how many of these students refrained from participating because they did not wish to discuss a transfer experience in which they felt they had not been successful. If this supposition is true, their lack of participation is unfortunate because their experiences would have greatly enriched the data of this study.

Though this study focused primarily on the experiences of the transfer students, the researcher also interviewed two administrators from SU who have significant interactions with transfer students, in order to learn the institutional perspective on the transfer process. It is the belief of the researcher that a successful transition process requires efforts on the part of the both the students and the institution. Thus, interviewing administrators involved with transfer students was expected to elucidate whether the administration of the transfer institution holds this same belief, and what programs and

services are provided by the institution to facilitate the transition process. The two administrators who were interviewed were the Associate Dean of Students, who coordinates the transfer orientation program and will be called Dean O; and an Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, who serves as advisor to transfer students in the College of Arts and Sciences, and will be called Dean A.

The Participants

Because the assertions in this study were generated largely from interviews with students who have transferred from LCC to SU, and with administrators at SU, a small amount of background information on each participant will be helpful to the reader.

Darby- A woman in her early 20s and an extremely dedicated student, Darby hopes to attend medical school or graduate school in neurology, and thus is taking primarily science courses. She derives great satisfaction from her work at a resource center affiliated with the SU's Women's Center.

Matt- A young man of traditional college age, Matt matriculated in a military college the summer after graduation from high school. While he was happy there over the summer, he left the college after two weeks of the fall semester due to discomfort with the atmosphere of the college and with the treatment of the freshmen by upper-class students. He attended LCC for two years before transferring to SU. At SU, Matt was accepted into the Special Education program in the School of Education, but not

sure he really wanted to pursue that degree, Matt initially elected to major in biology as a means of keeping his options open should he decide not to pursue the special education degree. However, early in his first semester at SU it became clear to Matt that he did wish to pursue the special education degree, and that he was not interested in a biology degree. With the help of Dean A, he was able to withdraw from the two biology courses in which he was enrolled but doing poorly, and change his Arts and Sciences major to sociology [the Education School requires all undergraduates to pursue a major in the College of Arts and Sciences]. Matt became actively involved in a religious group at SU, henceforth referred to as RG.

Christiana- A college student of non-traditional age who appears much younger than her thirty- some years, Christiana was raised in South America. She speaks several languages and has an unaffected aura of cosmopolitan sophistication. She attended a university in the West for two years after graduating high school but left college before graduating to marry and raise a family. She subsequently divorced and entered the Navy for five years. After discharge from the Navy, she decided to pursue a college degree. She plans to major in foreign affairs and would like a career with the U. S. diplomatic corps. Her children live with their father in Massachusetts.

Beth- Another college student in her mid-thirties, Beth briefly took classes at LCC after graduation from high school in Collegetown, but left to accept a full-time job with a financial institution in the area, as well as to marry and have a child. She, too,

subsequently divorced, and decided to pursue her education again while working full-time and raising her son. She is majoring in economics and wishes to leave the area after graduation to work in a financial institution in a larger city.

Brandy- Raised in a military family, Brandy lived in numerous cities around the United States while growing up. After graduating from high school, she briefly attended a four-year college in New York but withdrew due to poor grades, and enrolled in a two-year paralegal degree program at a community college close to her parents' home. She worked for several years as a paralegal, and during this time she also married and had a child. However, disenchanted with her career as a paralegal and divorced from her husband, Brandy took advantage of her mother's move to Collegetown to move with her mother to Collegetown and make a fresh start. She enrolled in LCC and eventually transferred to SU. During her time at LCC, Brandy met and married a man who has two children from a previous marriage. They live together with her child and one of his. She is majoring in psychology.

Alice- Alice, a young woman in her early 20s, enrolled in a Pennsylvania university on a ROTC scholarship in nursing after graduation from high school. However, she decided she did not care for nursing and moved to Virginia with her mother, who had retired to Collegetown. Alice taught at a local day care center for a year, and then decided she would like to pursue a degree in elementary education. She enrolled at LCC and then transferred to SU. Alice is a quiet woman who is

somewhat of a loner; she states that she has made few acquaintances at SU and socializes primarily with her family.

Sarah- Sarah, a cheerful, energetic, and down-to-earth woman in her early 20s, graduated from high school in Illinois, but her parents were in the midst of a move to Collegetown at this time. Enchanted with the beauty of SU, she applied to SU but was wait listed, and thus decided to attend LCC and try to transfer to SU. Sarah is majoring in American government and plans to either pursue a teaching degree or attend law school after graduation.

Julie- Julie attended high school in Collegetown and was accepted to SU on a track scholarship directly from high school, but in order to give Julie a chance to improve her running abilities, the SU track coaches advised her to defer enrollment at SU for a year. During this year Julie enrolled in classes at LCC, but trained with the SU track team. The following year Julie entered SU as a transfer student rather than a first-year student. Julie plans to major in psychology and is unsure of her goals after graduation from SU.

Dennis- A man in his thirties with a cheerful disposition and relaxed manner, but a somewhat jaded outlook on life, Dennis began his college career at a small private men's college directly after high school. After excessive socializing led to poor grades and withdrawal from this college, Dennis entered the military for a number of years. During this time he married and had a child. He returned to Collegetown

where he worked as a computer programmer in a local business. However, frustrated with his inability to advance in the company without a college degree, Dennis decided to enroll at LCC and transfer to SU. He also married a second time to a woman who has children from a previous marriage. Dennis seems to take adversity in stride, discussing with equanimity his wife's experience with breast cancer and the serious financial difficulties he and his wife were experiencing at the time of the interview. Dennis is majoring in economics and plans to attend law school after graduation from SU.

Jared- A brooding young man in his early 20s, Jared has aspirations of becoming a filmmaker. He applied to film school after high school but was not accepted. He then decided to enroll at LCC and transfer to SU. He has not given up on his dream of being a filmmaker, but decided to pursue a liberal arts degree before applying to film school as a masters student. A mass of contradictions, Jared is alternately laudatory and then critical of both LCC and SU. Many of his friends are graduate students in art or music, or members of the local jazz scene. Jared is a young man with unrealistically high expectations, but in the time since graduating from high school he appears to have learned increasingly well how to handle the disappointment of not having his expectations met.

Kate- Like Julie, Kate represents a special case for a transfer student. She attended LCC as a substitute for her senior year of high school. Because the high school in her district had few resources or academically motivated students, Kate had

completed most of what the high school could offer her by her senior year. After attending LCC as a dual enrollment student (the credits she earned at LCC counted towards high school graduation and a college degree), Kate transferred to SU as a second year student. Her experience was more positive than some of the other students in this study largely because she lived on campus in a dorm, and therefore was able to meet numerous students before classes even started. Kate is undecided about her major and post-graduation goals.

Sheila- Sheila is an older student who returned to school after having had a career and raising children. After high school, Sheila earned a two-year degree from a community college in Michigan and worked as a dental hygienist while her husband was in school and while her children were young. She began taking classes at LCC for her own intellectual satisfaction, but was encouraged by the counselors and faculty at LCC to transfer to SU. Lacking self-confidence, this encouragement from the faculty and staff at LCC played a critical role in her eventual transfer to SU and in her increasing confidence in herself as a student. Sheila is majoring in psychology.

Dean O- An Associate Dean of Student Services, she is responsible for planning the orientation program for transfer students, the first major interaction transfer students have with SU. The design of this program reveals her perceptions as to the needs of new transfer students.

Dean A- The Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences assigned to advise transfer students until they are assigned a faculty advisor. His interactions with transfer students as reported by the students during interviews and as observed during the orientation program, as well as his own comments on transfer students, reveal his perceptions as to the needs of new transfer students.

Support Services Provided by SU to Transfer Students

To help the reader understand a transfer student's experiences at SU, a brief overview of SU's programs and support services for transfer students will be reviewed here. During the summer prior to enrollment at SU, each transfer student receives a packet of information from Dean A's office. This packet includes a cover letter, an undergraduate catalog, a course offering directory, and a transfer handbook. The transfer handbook includes topics such as: Hints on Course Planning, Selection of Fall Courses and Evaluation of Transfer Credits, Registration and Orientation, Majors and Minors, and Advice for a Successful Transfer. Later in the summer, after evaluating the student's final transcripts from his/her community college, Dean A sends each student a statement detailing which of their courses will transfer to SU and an advising sheet that lists which requirements they must meet upon transfer to SU. Rising second year students are assigned a faculty advisor based upon the discipline they listed as their probable major. Third year students are not assigned faculty advisors because it is "assumed they will declare their major as part of their on campus orientation in August." The students are

expected to register for their fall courses by means of telephone registration over the summer. Thus, for their first semester at SU, they register for classes without meeting with an advisor. Dean A is willing to advise incoming transfer students during the summer either by phone or in person, but the students must take the initiative to make an appointment with him.

During the first week of classes, transfer students are encouraged to take part in the Transfer Student Orientation Program. This program, which is planned by Dean O and her staff, is designed to help transfer students acclimate to SU. The transfer program, in the words of Dean O, "weaves in and out of the first-year orientation program because, while some of the information needed by both groups is the same, some of the information is different." Dean Q is responsible for the events designed specifically for the transfer students. The incoming transfer students are divided into two groups, the traditionally aged students (18-23) and the nontraditionally aged students (24 and older). Each student is then assigned a Transfer Student Peer Advisor (TSPA), who is an undergraduate at SU, usually a former transfer student him or herself. The TSPAs are charged with guiding their assigned transfer students through the orientation program. They send their transfer students one or two letters over the summer, and then meet with them in small groups during certain parts of the orientation program. While the nontraditionally aged students meet once in small groups with their TSPAs, they also meet together in a large group of about 90-120 that is a mixture of transfer students and their TSPAs. According to Dean O, nontraditionally aged students meet once in this large group "because it's very nice for them to see others [of their age group]" rather then thinking there are just a few nontraditionally aged students in a sea of 18-22 year-olds.

The events that make up the transfer program are a mixture of events designed to familiarize students with both academic and social aspects of the university; these include an academic advising overview with Dean A, language placement tests, orientation to university computing systems, and a variety of picnics, dances and movies. [The above information was derived from an interview with Dean O and from Transfer Orientation brochures].

The Orientation Program during the first week of classes represents the only official support program offered by SU to help transfer students acclimate to SU. Once these activities are over, students must take the initiative to seek out Dean A or Dean O should they encounter problems. The official duties of the TSPAs also encompass only the Orientation Program activities, but many TSPAs give their telephone numbers to their advisees and encourage them to call should they have any questions. There does exist at SU a club for Nontraditional Students, the majority of whom are transfer students. This club functions predominantly as a social organization. How often the group meets is unclear-- only two student participants mentioned it, and then only to say that they did not have time to participate in its activities.

Instrumentation

As always, qualitative research involves the researcher as instrument. Interpretations reached by the researcher are necessarily influenced during both data collection and data analysis by the researcher's beliefs and past experiences. Kuh and Andreas (1991) noted that "investigators must be familiar with their own expectations,

values, and assumptions to recognize how these attributes may influence their judgments and interpretations" (p. 402). Further, Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (1993) noted that "the entire biography of the investigator- values, habits of perception, intellectual presumptions, and personal dispositions- becomes potentially relevant to gathering, analyzing, and understanding the data" (p. 110). Patton (1990) termed this phenomenon "evaluator effect" and suggested that there are four means by which the presence of an evaluator can influence the findings of a study:

1. reactions of program participants to the presence of the evaluator
2. changes in the evaluator (the measuring instrument) during the course of the evaluation
3. the predispositions or biases of the evaluator
4. evaluator incompetence (including lack of sufficient training or preparation) (p. 473)

Each of these factors was addressed by the researcher. The first was addressed by trying to create a warm rapport with each participant so as to gain their trust and facilitate honest and forthcoming responses from the participants. The second factor, changes in the evaluator, will be evident in the researcher's reflective journal, and thus can be analyzed over the course of the study by analyzing the journal.

The third factor, biases of the researcher, must be addressed by reporting "any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation" (Patton, 1990, p. 472). To this end, it must now be reported that the researcher is an instructor at John Tyler Community College, and thus has five years of experience teaching students in a college transfer program, albeit at a community college

other than the one from which the student participants were drawn. However, the researcher identified herself to student participants only as a graduate student in the Curry School of Education rather than as an instructor at a community college to prevent students from perhaps abridging negative comments about their community college experience. In addition to her professional experience at a community college, the researcher also attended the transfer institution in this study as an undergraduate, but as a native student, not as a transfer student. Researcher bias included the supposition that students transferring from a community college to a four-year institution that is considerably different from the community college experience problems of transition and adjustment. The researcher was aware, however, of the possibility that transfer students might not experience serious difficulties, and thus strove to use interview techniques and questions that allowed the students to describe their transfer experiences without presuming a negative experience.

Finally the fourth factor that may influence the results of a qualitative study, researcher incompetence, was a legitimate concern as this study was the researcher's first. However, it was hoped that this concern was compensated for by the oversight of the researcher's committee members who worked closely with the researcher.

The primary means of data collection for this study was in-depth, structured interviews of community college transfer students consisting primarily of specific, but open-ended questions. The interviews began by soliciting background information from each participant such as where the participant attended high school, the participant's plans upon high school graduation, why the participant attended community college, and how the participant chose the transfer institution. The next section of the interview focused on

the participant's experiences at the transfer institution, addressing first academic experiences and then social experiences (acknowledging that these experiences often overlap). Participants were asked if they noticed a difference in culture between the community college and the transfer institution, and if so, if these differences created any transition difficulties for them. The researcher asked the participants to describe any academic difficulties encountered arising from differences in academic culture between the community college and the four-year institution, such as differences in academic rigor, in pedagogical styles of the faculty, in classroom atmosphere, and in academic advising. In addition, the researcher also asked the participants to describe any difficulties encountered due to differences in the social culture between the community college and the four-year institution, such as establishment of peer groups, the participant's living situation, and the participant's participation in co-curricular activities. (See Appendix A for a copy of the Interview Protocol.)

Student participants were also administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), (Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1986, 1989), a self-report measure of adjustment to college (see Appendix B for sample questions from the SACQ). The SACQ is a 67 item survey containing four subscales measuring academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment. The four subscales are briefly described below:

Academic adjustment- Students are asked to address the following issues: their attitudes towards academic work, how well they are applying themselves to their academic work, the effectiveness of their academic efforts, and the acceptability of their

academic environment and program. Lower scores are associated with a lower grade point average in the freshman year, being on academic probation, and unstable and age-inappropriate goals.

Social adjustment- Students are asked to address the following issues: extent and success of social activities, interpersonal relationships, social relocation, and acceptability of social environment. Lower scores are associated with being viewed by independent evaluators as less qualified in terms of social skills, less success in separating from home ties and establishing social autonomy, greater sense of loneliness, greater social avoidance and social distress, and less social self-confidence and social self-concept.

Personal-emotional adjustment- Students are asked to address how they are feeling psychologically and physically. Lower scores are associated with greater likelihood of being known to a campus psychological services center, greater emotional reliance on other persons, fewer psychological coping resources and a lesser degree of mental health or psychological well-being.

Institutional/goal commitment- Students are asked to address their level of commitment to

obtaining a bachelor's degree and to that particular institution. Lower scores are associated with greater likelihood of discontinuance of enrollment and less overall satisfaction with the college experience. (Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1986, 1989)

Each item in the SACQ is a statement to which the students respond by circling from a row of nine asterisks the number of asterisks they feel best gauges their level of agreement with the statement. The sum of scores from all 67 items results in an overall score of adjustment, while the sum of each of the four subscales represents a score for that subscale. In scoring the participant responses, the raw scores are converted to T scores with an average of 50 and a standard deviation of 10. Therefore, "T scores of 40 and 30 would be regarded as low and very low, respectively, and 60 and 70 would be seen as high and very high, respectively" (Baker and Siryk, 1989, p. 16).

It should be noted that the questions in the SACQ and those in the interviews differ in that the SACQ asks the students only about their experience at one institution (in this case, the transfer institution), while the interview questions asked the students to compare experiences at two institutions (the community college and the transfer institution). However, scores on the SACQ should provide a relative means of confirming or disconfirming the students' statements regarding academic and social adjustment at the transfer institution.

Several special considerations exist in using this instrument. First, Baker and Siryk (1989) caution that, because adjustment to college is a complex process, " the SACQ should not be used simplistically or in isolation. Minimally, an interview should be used to supplement, corroborate, and investigate the results" (p. 5). This study approached the authors' suggestion in the reverse manner- the SACQ was used to corroborate the interviews. Second, an important limitation of the instrument is its transparency of purpose. The authors noted that "it is readily apparent to anyone looking

at the questionnaire that it is intended to determine the effectiveness of a student's adjustment to college, ... [and therefore] it is vulnerable to the faking or rigging of responses in order to make a student appear either more or less well adapted" (1989, p. 5). Finally, a third limitation of the SACQ, according to R. W. Baker (personal communication, October 27, 1997) is that it was designed for use with students of traditional college age, rather than nontraditional-aged college students. As many of the participants in this study were older than the traditional college student, the validity of the SACQ results in this study could again be questioned.

Baker and Siryk (1986, 1989) reported full scale Cronbach's alphas (a measure of internal consistency) between 0.92 and 0.95 for the SACQ, scores obtained from seven separate studies at two different institutions. For each of the subscales of the SACQ, the Cronbach alpha range is listed below:

academic:	0.81-0.90
social	0.83-0.91
personal/emotional	0.77-0.86
institutional/goal	0.85-0.91

The authors noted that an alpha of 0.80 is required for research purposes, while an alpha of 0.90 is required for applied purposes. The fact that the alphas of the subscales are below the level required for applied purposes is an important issue because the authors envision using this instrument as "a diagnostic instrument for informed remedial intervention in the lives of students experiencing difficulty in adjusting to college" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 187).

With respect to validity, Baker and Siryk (1984, 1989) also reported median intercorrelations among the subscales and between the subscales and the full scale that

were almost all within the acceptable range. Exceptions involved comparison of the personal/emotional subscale with the other three subscales (Baker & Siryk, 1984). These intercorrelations were obtained from 34 administrations of the SACQ at 21 different colleges and universities. The authors also noted that "the subscales are found to relate to a statistically significant degree to independent indices of adjustment relevant to particular subscales" (Baker & Siryk, 1984, p. 188), indicating criterion-related validity. These indices represent important behaviors or accomplishments of college students and include attrition, grade point average, involvement in social activities, and election to an honor society.

Baker and Siryk, thus, envision college administrators and staff using this tool not only to identify students experiencing difficulty in adjusting to college, but also to identify wherein lie their problems by examining scores on the subscales. They suggested that the institutional/goal commitment subscale "provides an index of the quality of the relationship or bond that is established between the individual students and the institution, while the other subscales offer insight into the effectiveness of adjustment in the academic, social and personal-emotional spheres" (1984, p. 187).

Data Collection

Because each type of qualitative data collection has its associated strengths and weaknesses, proponents of qualitative research advocate the use of multiple methods "to make the most of the strengths and to reduce the impact of limitations" (Whitt, 1991, p. 412) of each method. The bulk of the data in this study was collected through in-depth

interviews of twelve transfer students that each lasted between one to two hours depending on the verbosity of the participant. These interviews were taped and transcribed for subsequent analysis, and addressed the transfer experience of each student, including any academic and social difficulties experienced by the participants at the four-year institution. Administration of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) occurred after the interviews took place and each response was analyzed according to the SACQ Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire Manual (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

Interviews with two administrators at the transfer institution were also conducted. These interviews were also taped and transcribed, and addressed the administrators' perceptions of the transition experienced by community college transfer students, as well as measures taken by the institution to address common transition problems. In addition, an observation was conducted of the Fall 1997 Transfer Student Orientation at SU. As this program was sponsored and developed by the SU administration, it revealed the administrators' perceptions of the transition experienced by community college transfer students.

Data Management

Tapes of the interviews were stored in the researcher's home. Interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word and stored on the hard drive of the researcher's personal computer located in her home, as well as backed up on diskettes that were also stored in the researcher's home. Participant responses to the SACQ were mailed by the

participants to the researcher's home address and examined at her home. The security of the data was ensured by the fact that the data remained in the privacy of the researcher's home. Analysis and write-up of the data similarly occurred exclusively in the researcher's home except for consultations with committee members.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews and the notes from the orientation observation were analyzed according to Erickson's method of analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). The method of analytic induction is a two-step process: the researcher first develops assertions from patterns in the data, and then warrants the assertions by searching the data record for confirming and disconfirming evidence. Should disconfirming evidence for an assertion be found, the researcher must amend the assertion or account for the discrepancy. In studying the data record, a researcher might produce 20-25 assertions; however, these are reduced and refined by reading the data again and again. After warranting assertions, accounting for disconfirming evidence, and reducing the number of assertions, the researcher groups the remaining assertions and looks for ways in which assertions are related in order to establish a dominant assertion that links the others. The dominant assertion should be the assertion that best answers the research question.

An important component of qualitative data analysis is data reduction (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Patton, 1990). Qualitative data collection methods result in the accumulation of large amounts of data in the form of text, usually from observations or interviews. The researcher must reduce the volume of data without eliminating the

meaning or context of the data. Reduction often involves a search for recurrent patterns or themes in the data to produce an overarching hypothesis or conclusion, and eliminating data not relevant to the conclusions. Reflexivity is another important component of qualitative data analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher constantly alternates between data collection and data analysis: early data collection is followed by data analysis in which tentative suppositions are generated and then tested with further data collection. The two processes are inter-related and build on each other.

Finally, in qualitative research, trustworthiness is always an issue. Whitt (1991) noted that "qualitative research presents problems for the researcher who wants to adhere to traditional standards of scientific credibility ... Replicability ... is impossible, given the context-boundedness of qualitative studies" (p. 413). For Erickson (1986), validity depends on the authenticity and coherence of the results. Because Erickson's method of data analysis holds that each person constructs his or her own reality, validity does not come from replicability but from the quality of data and how convincingly the researcher's assertions are warranted by the data. Thus, validity comes not from a generalized image of some reality, but from generating assertions drawn from the multiple perspectives found in the data. Because the findings of the study (and thus the coherence) are closely tied to the data, the type and quality of data are crucial.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that in order to establish trustworthiness, the researcher must demonstrate credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is ensured by the use of multiple methods of data collection which allows for triangulation of data. In this study, results from the SACQ provided a means of substantiating the data in the student interviews. The observation of the orientation

program substantiated the administrator interviews. In addition, member checking with student participants was performed.

Transferability, the second component of trustworthiness, is the notion that the findings of the study may be useful in another context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Whitt, 1991). Because generalizability is precluded in qualitative research due to the small sample size and the context sensitivity of qualitative research methods, transferability is the goal of qualitative researchers. Therefore, it is hoped that the findings of this study will transfer to institutions of like size and clientele: public community colleges and four-year universities in a suburban area. Determining the relevance of this study to other institutions will be facilitated for interested administrators and faculty by the researcher's use of thick description with regard to transfer student experiences and institutional characteristics. Although generalizability is not possible, the findings of this study do provide insights to the transfer experience of community college transfer students, and thus provide information that four-year institutions can use to increase retention of these students.

Dependability, the third component of trustworthiness, requires documentation of changes in the study over time and accountability as to the appropriateness of decisions relating to emergent design. Evidence to this effect was documented in the researcher's reflective journal. Finally, confirmability "is demonstrated by showing that the findings are based on the data and that the interpretations of the data are logical" (Whitt, 1991, p. 413). This final component of trustworthiness can be documented through an audit trail or natural history of the study which includes such items as working notes, field notes,

analytic memos, and the reflective journal. Together these items allow the reader to trace the analysis of data and the evolution of the researcher's interpretations and conclusions.

Confidentiality/Ethics

Ethics are of special concern in qualitative research. Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (1993) noted that "whenever investigators enter into the daily lives of others at the level of intrusion required for a qualitative study, significant problems of ethics are raised" (p. 115). The authors noted that interview participants are normally exposed to some risk in sharing the intimate details of their lives, and therefore qualitative researchers have an obligation to protect the best interests of the participants. Patton (1990) noted that important ethical issues that must be considered include risk assessment, confidentiality, informed consent, and data ownership. Risk assessment, determining ways in which participants subject themselves to negative repercussions by participating in the study, was not of great concern for this study. Students did not jeopardize their academic standing at either the community college or the transfer institution by participating in the study. However, any risk students might have perceived in participating in the study was, it is hoped, lessened by the assurance of confidentiality by the researcher. The researcher changed the names of the participants in the report, as well as the names of other identifying aspects of the participants' lives, such as places of employment. Also, as mentioned previously, data from the interviews was stored securely in the privacy of the researcher's home, and analyzed only by the researcher and members of the dissertation committee. With respect to informed consent, student

participants were provided with an informed consent form which lists their rights as participants in the study, and details how their confidentiality will be maintained (see Appendix C). Finally, with respect to data ownership, participants were mailed transcribed copies of their interviews and allowed to make any corrections or clarifications they wished prior to analysis of the data. Although the researcher no longer sought participant input after analysis of the data began, each participant was entitled to withdraw from the study at any time, a right that was made clear in the informed consent form.

The ethical guidelines outlined above were reviewed by the Human Subject Committee of the University of Virginia, without whose approval the study could not have been conducted. Finally, the researcher was held to these guidelines by the oversight of her committee members.

Results of a Pilot Study

In the spring of 1997, the researcher conducted a pilot study for this project, interviewing nine students who had transferred from LCC to the College of Arts and Sciences of SU in the fall of 1996. The major research question for this study was:

> What academic and social problems do community college students face in adjusting to their transfer institution?

The participants for this pilot study included two traditional-age males, two nontraditional-age males, four traditional-age females and one non-traditional-age female. The pilot study also included interviews of the two SU administrators mentioned previously; the data from these interviews were used for this study as well. The pilot

study did not include administration of the SACQ or attendance of the 1996 Transfer Student Orientation.

After analyzing the data from the nine student interviews and the two administrator interviews, the researcher arrived at the following assertions:

Assertion 1: The teacher-student relationship is more formal and distant at SU than at LCC.

Assertion 2: The courses at SU are much more demanding that at LCC, especially in the writing and reading requirements, a result of which is a competitive atmosphere among the SU students.

Assertion 3: It is difficult to meet people at SU because many friendships among native students are made through the first-year experience when students live together in dorms and are open to forming friendships. Lacking the dorm experience, and due to the fact that meeting students in class is difficult, most transfer students make their friends through university sponsored clubs or activities.

Assertion 4: Community college transfer students view students at SU as being privileged and taking these privileges for granted.

Assertion 5: Administrators at the four-year institution either are not aware of or underestimate the difficulties inherent in the transition process experienced by transfer students, an assertion that is evidenced by the fact that few of the students attending the transfer orientation sponsored by the administration found it helpful. However, while students may have a few practical suggestions for the administration, many are not sure how much the administration can do to improve the process.

Assertion 6: Even though some students felt their community college experience did not prepare them for the rigors of SU, students appreciate LCC for the transition and validation experience it afforded them, as well as the opportunity it afforded them to attend SU. While many have negative feelings towards the academic and/or social culture at SU, they recognize the honor in and opportunities available from attending SU.

By analyzing these six assertions and the evidence to warrant them in detail, the researcher arrived at the seventh and key assertion:

> Satisfaction in life requires finding or creating a niche for oneself. Unless community college transfer students already have such a niche in their life upon matriculating to SU, a positive transition requires finding a niche at the transfer institution in which to make and build relationships.

A significant pattern that emerged from the data collected in the nine student interviews was the importance of finding a niche. The students who had the most satisfying transition experiences were those who had either found or made a place for themselves at SU. These niches provided a sense of security and meaning to the students' lives. In addition, they were often the primary means through which the students experienced social interaction with other SU students and by which they made the majority of their friends. Upon transferring to a new institution, students are forced to cut ties with an old, familiar culture (the community college) and forge ties within their new environment (the transfer institution), a process that can be disorienting and leave the students feeling lost and adrift (Tinto, 1988). By finding a niche within the transfer institution, however, the student is able to anchor himself or herself to some component of the new environment, and thus achieve both a sense of security and a sense of purpose. Finding a niche at the transfer institution, thus, allowed the students to re-establish their previous sense of control over their lives, as well as to affirm their importance and significance in the world. While for most students in the study, establishing a niche at SU centered around social activities or organizations at SU, some students found their niche through their academic work at SU, and still others were not interested in finding a niche at SU. This last group had already established a niche for themselves outside the university (usually through a family), and thus did not need to search for one at SU. For those students hoping to create a niche for themselves through social activities or organizations at SU,

time was found to be a confounding factor, usually due to both the increased rigor of course work at SU and the students' need to work off campus.

Because the major research questions of the pilot study focused on the problems encountered by community college students in adjusting to the transfer institution, the interview questions were focused on the negative aspects of the transition process. The sample of students who were interviewed, however, displayed a range of transition experiences from relatively smooth to very difficult. However, because the interview guide focused on the difficulties encountered by students, a one-sided picture of the transfer experience emerged, one that overlooked the overall positive experiences of some of the students and the positive aspects of the transfer experiences of those students who did encounter a number of transition difficulties. The current study, however, was designed to approach the interviews from a more neutral position, allowing the students to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of their transfer experience. From these data, then, the researcher was able to portray an overall picture of the transfer experience, in both its negative and positive aspects. In addition to creating an overall picture of the transfer experience, however, the researcher also highlighted specific difficulties mentioned by some of the students, as well as student recommendations for how future transfer students could avoid these difficulties or how administrators at the transfer institution could address these difficulties.

The assertions posited for the current study differ somewhat from those of the pilot study. Because a different cohort of students was interviewed for each study, the members of which necessarily had differing and distinct experiences, different assertions arose from the data for each study. Also, as mentioned above, differences in the

interview protocols of the two studies probably led to differences in the data set. In the current study, many students noted feeling overwhelmed by being thrust into a new academic and social environment upon initial transfer to SU. However, because their peers at SU were already familiar with the academic and social cultures of SU, the transfer students felt a need to quickly "catch up" and become as adjusted to SU as their peers. Both cohorts noted the difference in academic rigor and decreased amount of faculty-student interaction, as well as the difficulty in assimilating into the social culture at SU. Additionally, both cohorts perceived differences between the socioeconomic backgrounds of LCC and SU students. However, the students in the second cohort seemed to have much more positive interactions with the SU administration than the previous cohort, as exemplified in their experiences with advising and the orientation program. Finally, the first cohort of students, while generally less satisfied with their transfer experience, nonetheless spoke in awed tones of the honor bestowed upon them in attending SU. This feeling was not evident in the participants of the second cohort, who seemed to take a much more pragmatic approach to attending SU.

Despite the generally more positive transfer experiences of the second cohort of students, the experiences of these students still ranged from relatively smooth to stressful and difficult. This range of experiences is illustrated in the vignettes that open Chapter 4. A vignette is a richly descriptive summary of data collected during a study. The vignette "does not represent the original event itself… [Rather], the vignette is an abstraction; an analytic caricature (of a friendly sort) in which some details are sketched in and others are left out" (Erickson, 1986, p. 150). Thus, the two vignettes that follow do not represent the experiences of any one student in the study but were created by combining the

experiences of several students. The two vignettes are meant to demonstrate the range in transfer experiences found in this study, from the very positive to the very negative. In addition to giving the reader a descriptive picture of the transfer process, these vignettes also beg the question, "how can two such varying experiences result from students who are transferring from and to the same institutions?" In the remainder of Chapter 4, the researcher addresses this question by presenting the assertions that arose from the data in this study with accompanying evidentiary examples and interpretive commentary. Finally, the assertions are linked together by the key assertion, an overriding conclusion that links the findings of the study together in one unifying theme and answers the question raised by the vignettes.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Vignette 1

My first semester at SU? How long do you have? [She laughs.] I guess I would have to say it was extremely chaotic and busy, but it was also lonely, intimidating, and at times, downright frustrating. Don't get me wrong-- I'm glad to be at SU because it's such a prestigious school. Having a degree from SU will help me get places-- and things are going better now--but the transfer between LCC and SU was rough.

Registration was a nightmare. You did it over the phone during the summer so there was no one to talk to about it. And transfers get last dibs in registration, so many of the classes I needed were filled already. When I got to SU in the fall, I did get to meet with an advisor, but he was useless to me. When I entered his office he was on the phone with reporters interviewing him about his latest book. He spent the whole time talking about his book and other matters unrelated to me. So to get into the classes I wanted, I was forced to try to register by means of force-adds. I never thought that registration would be an humiliating experience. You have to try to track down professors of the classes you want to get into who are all trying to hide from you because they've got about 60 other students also chasing them around trying to do the same thing. Then comes the first day of class, when 75 people show up for a class limited to 25. And they all wave

these force-add slips around hoping to be the lucky ones who get into the class. It was at that point I realized that a big difference between LCC and SU was that at LCC you are treated as an adult as a matter of course; at SU you have to force them to treat you as an adult.

And then school started, and that was another shock. The teaching is so different at SU. I mean, I knew classes would be harder at SU, but I just wasn't prepared for this. It was total culture shock. The biggest thing for me was not being able to get help from the professors, either during or after class. At SU, you don't have the opportunity to ask questions in class. At LCC, the teacher would be in the middle of discussing something and you could raise your hand and ask a question. Even getting help after class at SU is hard. When I told my chemistry teacher I had questions, he said to contact the TA-- he didn't have time. In that sense, academics are more formal at SU: a teacher is a teacher and you respect that. It's almost as if they are further away from us, like on a pedestal, and it's intimidating. At LCC, I felt much more equal with my professors. I could discuss things with them. At SU, you definitely feel the teachers are not people, they are teachers, and you are a lowly student.

Basically, I felt totally out of control. I felt like I spent most of the semester running around frantically trying to get someone to help me with my classes. I know I understood the subject matter in my classes at LCC better because I got my questions answered. But it wasn't just course content. I felt like everyone else knew what was going on but me. Like web pages for courses, I didn't know until the semester was almost over that there are actual chat pages for certain classes. You can put questions up and either other students or the teacher will answer them. I didn't know about this-- it

wasn't in the syllabus, and I went to all my classes but two. How did the students *know* about this? I felt so out of the loop! At SU, it's all about accumulating information. At LCC, if you wanted to know something, you just ask a teacher or a counselor. Here, it's like one of your tasks is to go through the process of tracking down information. Nothing is given to you at SU-- you have to work for it, including just general information.

The students at SU are way different, too. At LCC all ages, classes, and demographic groups are represented. I missed that democratic mix at SU. Most of the students at SU seem to be 18-22 years old, upper-middle class, and have perfect teeth. Also, it was hard to meet people. There was nothing to bind me to people out of class. Unless I chose a club and went to a meeting, I would not have been socially involved with anything. First years have their dorms where they meet people. Transfers have nothing-- there's no support network for us.

But things are much better now. I'm much more comfortable now. I know where everything is and there are people in my classes from last semester, so I talk to them occasionally. I'm used to the way classes are here at SU, and since I'm in upper division courses now, some of my classes are smaller. Not like at LCC, but a reasonable size. I feel like I've learned how to work the system at SU: how to maximize my time with my teachers, how to get information if I can't get hold of my teacher or my TA. I have a regular schedule now, and I have my activities that I'm involved with-- Peer Health Advising and Karate Club. I'm not as lonely now. It's just the most utterly lonely thing in the world to be living in a new place, going to a new school, not knowing anybody, not sure how to get to know anybody. So it was hard, but it's just something you have to

adjust to. It's a transition, and in some respects, there's no way to avoid it-- it's just something you have to get through. One thing I can say is I feel really good about myself. There were a lot of fiascoes and frustrations last semester, but I can honestly say I *survived*. And that was all I was hoping for at the beginning of the semester when I felt so lost and disoriented. Now that I'm adjusted to SU, I'm doing better in school and I feel like I have my bearings again. I'm going to be OK.

Vignette 2

My transfer to SU? It was easy. I mean you had to learn a lot of new stuff like how to register for classes and where your classes were, but I really had no problems. My classes are so much more stimulating at SU than at LCC. At LCC I didn't put much effort into my classes. Going to class and listening was enough-- I never did the assigned reading. On tests and papers you just write down what the teacher told you in class- you didn't have to do much of your own thinking. Boy, was I in for a shock when I got to SU. The teachers here expect you to not only read the assigned material, but think about it and be prepared to discuss it. It was stressful at first because I had never been expected to do that, but once I got the hang of it I found classes to be so much more enjoyable. I do miss the personal interaction I had with my professors at LCC where the classes were all really small. All my classes at SU are big, but we have discussion sections with a TA once a week, and those are where you get to discuss the course material. I really enjoy the discussions we have during these sections. Everyone at SU comes to class prepared and participates in the discussion. At LCC, no one was ever prepared for class and no one

ever wanted to participate in class discussions. It was usually just me and one or two other people in the class who would talk. At SU, the students are so much more motivated than at LCC.

As far as meeting people, it was tough at first but I live in a dorm where other transfers live, so I met lots of people there and also, if you make an effort, you can get to know people in your classes by striking up conversations before class starts. Of course, not everyone will talk to you. Some students sit in little groups and are very snooty-- they won't talk to anyone outside their group. The Greek system is like that- none of my friends are in the Greek system because they just don't welcome outsiders like me. So you have to strategically pick people to talk to. Also, I joined the Psychology Club so I could get to meet people in my major, and then I see those people in class, so it gets easier as time goes by. But you really do have to try. It's not like at LCC where everyone is relaxed and informal and pretty open to talking to anyone. I mean, at LCC teenagers and middle-age people are in the same class and talk to each other. But at SU people are all the same age and the social system is really rigid. Everyone seems to be mysteriously assigned to some contingent of the social hierarchy and you don't talk to people who are not in your "group". The trick is to find other people who, for whatever reason, are in your group, and then everything is fine, and you don't care much about all those other people who won't talk to you.

Yeah, SU is real different than LCC, but I really like it here. I liked LCC too, but being at SU is exciting because it's so big and there are so many more opportunities here. It takes a little while to get used to the differences between LCC and SU, but then everything is fine.

Introduction

These two vignettes were created from the experiences and stories of the students in this study. They are meant to illustrate the two extremes of the transfer experiences reported by participants in this study. In analyzing the data from the twelve student interviews, the researcher found a great variety of experiences. In general, most students' experiences lay somewhere in the middle between these extremes.

All of the students in this study transferred from the same community college to the same university. How, then, could their experiences be so different? The student in the first vignette encountered difficulties in adjusting to both the academic and social cultures of the transfer institution. The student in the second vignette, by contrast, encountered relatively few difficulties during this transition process. Why did one student have so many difficulties and the other did not? While both students eventually transitioned to their satisfaction to SU, this process obviously was much harder for the first student than for the second. Does the second student's experience provide insights that could be used to help transfer students who encounter difficulties similar to those experienced by the first student? In analyzing the data, the researcher attempted to understand why the difficulty of the transition varied from participant to participant, and what could be learned from these experiences to help future transfer students.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the twelve student and two administrator interviews conducted during this study were analyzed according to Erickson's method of analytic induction (Erickson, 1986). The researcher read and re-read the transcribed interviews

searching for repeating themes in the participants' experiences. From these themes, the researcher generated ten to twelve assertions that were continuously modified as new data were collected. These assertions were then warranted by finding supporting evidence among the data collected from the interviews. Any disconfirming evidence for each assertion was noted, and the researcher then either accounted for this evidence or modified the assertion. Finally, these assertions were reduced in number resulting in eight broader, more generalized assertions.

These eight assertions are presented below. The first three assertions relate to the students' experiences with the social culture at SU. The first describes the initial feeling of disorientation that many students reported during their first weeks at SU as they tried to adjust to an academic and social environment to which their peers at SU had had two years to come to know and understand. The second assertion discusses the difficulty that transfer students experienced in trying to develop social connections at SU. Because the native students had already formed friendships, primarily during their first-year experience living in the dorms, they were not seeking new friendships like the transfer students were. Thus, the transfer students had to make concerted efforts to establish social connections at SU. Finally, the third assertion discusses the transfer students' perceptions of the differences in socioeconomic background between themselves and their peers at SU, differences that they felt were reflected in the arrogant and snobbish attitudes they saw in some native students. Assertions four and five describe the academic experiences of the transfer students at SU. The students especially noted no differences in academic rigor and faculty interaction between LCC and SU. In assertion six, the incongruence between the SU administration's and the students' views of the

transfer experience is examined. Assertion seven details participant suggestions for how the administration could improve the transfer experience. Finally, the eighth assertion is the key assertion that links the previous seven assertions together in one unifying conclusion and answers the question, raised by the opening vignettes, of why the quality of the transfer experience varied so greatly among these students.

The eight assertions are listed below:

1. Upon transfer to SU, many students initially felt lost amid an academic and social environment that was new to them, and therefore perceived the need to quickly assimilate into this environment to which their peers were already assimilated.

2. It was difficult for transfer students to make new friends at SU because many friendships among native students were made through the first-year experience when students live in dorms and are open to forming friendships. Lacking the dorm experience, and due to the fact that meeting students in class is difficult, most transfer students who were interested in being involved in SU's social scene made their friends through university sponsored clubs or activities.

3. LCC transfer students viewed students at the SU as being financially and socially privileged, and as taking these privileges for granted. They were, however, impressed at how academically motivated and committed the SU students were.

4. The courses at SU were much more demanding than at LCC, especially in their writing and reading requirements, one result of which was a competitive atmosphere among the SU students.

5. The teaching-focused mission of LCC, as well as the small size of the institution, allowed the LCC faculty to focus on the academic progress of their students. By contrast, students at SU, because of its larger size and its mission that emphasizes research in addition to teaching, received less direct contact with their professors and were required to be much more self-directed. This difference in academic culture between the two institutions can potentially create transition difficulties for community college transfer students.

6. Administrators at the transfer institution underestimated the difficulties inherent in the transition process experienced by transfer students.

7. Participants of the study offered several suggestions for ways the administration at SU could improve the transition process.

8. Satisfaction with one's university life requires finding or creating a niche for oneself. A positive transition required finding a niche at the transfer institution in which to make and build relationships.

The seven assertions and the key assertion will be discussed in more detail below. Before doing so, however, it should be noted that confidence in the students' comments made during the interviews and used as evidence for the eight assertions is affirmed by the results of the SACQ administered to the student participants. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the students in this study were administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) as a means of corroborating their statements in their interview regarding their level of adjustment to the transfer institution. While both the interview and the SACQ are self-reporting means of collecting data, the results of the SACQ serve as a means of corroboration because the questions are asked in a much different format than those asked during the interview. After scoring the questionnaires, it was determined that the results of the SACQ generally matched the students' own comments as to their adjustment to SU (see Appendix D), and thus the results of the SACQ serve as confirmatory evidence that give credibility to the data collected during the interviews and used to generate the following assertions. Specific discussion of SACQ results is provided with Assertion 8.

Assertion 1

Upon transfer to SU, many students initially felt lost amid an academic and social environment that was new to them, and therefore perceived the need to quickly assimilate into this environment to which their peers were already assimilated.

When asked about their emotions and experiences during the first week of the fall semester at SU, the transfer students in this study provided a variety of responses, but one theme that was common to most students was the feeling of being lost amid a large crowd of students who already knew the "ins and outs" of the academic and social cultures at SU. Upon transfer to SU, the LCC students needed to learn the logistics of functioning as a student at SU (where various buildings are located, how to register for a class, etc.), as well as complete the more lengthy process of understanding the workings of the academic and social cultures at SU, for example, how to study for an essay test or how to meet people in their classes. For a few of the transfer students in this study, however, this difficult transition experience was facilitated by having native students as friends who could answer questions and help solve problems the students encountered.

The first week of classes at SU was described by several students as a blur of activities in which to take part and tasks that needed to be accomplished. The tasks facing the students included registering for classes, buying books, finding their way

around campus, and setting up their living quarters by such activities as unpacking their belongings and establishing electrical and telephone service. In addition to these tasks, many of the students also participated in the orientation activities of the Transfer Student Orientation Program and worked at their part-time jobs. The overwhelming disorientation felt by the transfer students during those first few weeks at SU is clearly illustrated by the following comment:

> It is very intimidating. You don't know where to buy your books, you don't know who the good teachers are, you don't know where the buildings are. At LCC we have one, maybe two buildings. You get to SU and you are in a class of 200 people. It was total culture shock. I envisioned it would be more difficult, but it was such culture shock, it really was. (Darby)

In addition to accomplishing the initial logistical tasks of enrolling as a student at SU, the transfer students also had to learn how to assimilate into both the academic and social culture at SU, a more lengthy and ambiguous undertaking. While finding the math department is a task with which a transfer student can easily secure assistance, learning how to take notes in a large lecture class or how to make new friends within the social context of SU are endeavors that cannot be accomplished merely by asking a simple question. Becoming familiar with the more complex aspects of the academic and social cultures was a process that, at least for some students, required the greater part of their first semester at SU.

> At the start of the semester I felt like an outsider pretty much because it seemed as though everybody else had been going to school for so long, and they had their connections, they already knew where everything was. I was an outsider the first semester. (Brandy)

Darby also made reference to this assimilation process. She noted that during her first semester at SU she was "learning how to work the system. I mean, there're a lot of little

things that you pick up and you have to learn them, and I know them now [in her second semester at SU]." Several students in addition to Darby also noted that their second semester at SU was going much better than their first because they felt like they understood the how the system at SU worked.

Several students expressed feeling a sense of a sense of urgency about this assimilation process during their first semester because, as they noted, their peers had had two years to assimilate into the SU "scene", whereas they were thrown into this environment as third year students.

> I had the feeling like I had to catch up. Most of the people had been here for two years, and then some people had transferred from bigger schools. I felt like I had to do a little catching up. Like I had to get used to all that. I had to -- you know, there's like a lingo; like a jargon for college students. And I had to catch on. And even like using the Blue Book at SU. I had no idea about that. (Sarah)

Adding to the difficulty of the assimilation process was the perception by some students that the information they needed to successfully accomplish this endeavor was not readily available. Darby, in particular, noted the difficulties she experienced in becoming familiar with the workings of SU. She mentioned several incidents in which she felt at a disadvantage because she was unaware of important information that her peers seemed to already know. In one of her classes, she did not learn until close to the end of the semester that the professor had created a chat page where students could pose questions that either she or other students would answer. Another example involved learning how to use the bus system. Darby saw students using the buses but had no idea which bus went where and on what schedule. One day she finally walked up to a student she did not know and asked him how the bus system worked. She noted in frustration, "I didn't know about the bus system. I had to look for it. No one told me about the bus

system." Finally, Darby also mentioned her surprise and frustration when she learned that computer facilities were located in numerous buildings all over campus rather than in just the one location she knew of:

> Learning where the [computer] labs were was a pain in the butt. Because every large building has a lab hidden away in some little corner somewhere but I didn't know that. So I would always go to the same one where I registered for e-mail, which was really out of my way. But I always went there because I didn't realize there were other computer labs. Nobody told me this!!

While Darby's experience was more extreme than that of the other transfer students who were interviewed, several students did mention having trouble gaining access to information they needed. For example, Sarah noted with frustration the difficulty she experienced in trying to become part of clubs and organizations on campus. She perceived that native students, having been at SU for two years, knew what clubs existed and how to become involved with them, while she was scrambling to discover this same information.

> There's a lot of organizations that sort of keep to themselves. It seems like it's very secretive. I'm sure that they're more than welcome to have members come in and everything. But it just seems almost exclusive; finding out about them sometimes is difficult. (Sarah)

Several students noted in frustration that they found out about important aspects of the advising and registration process after important dates had passed.

> When I applied to SU, they always asked what my major would be and I always told them Foreign Affairs. I thought that was enough. I didn't realize that there was an incredible process in declaring a major and I had to see those professors and see what my class plan was going to be. I didn't realize that until I was about to register for this semester. I had to scramble. (Christiana)

> I didn't know that there was a deadline [for spring registration] for third years and fourth years. I didn't know that, and I missed mine. . . I have no idea how I was supposed to know. So I was behind in registering. When I went to go register, I found out that most of the classes were full; the ones that I needed, the ones that I wanted

> and stuff. That's when I went in to talk to somebody and she told me, 'Oh, you were supposed to register a week ago.' (Sarah)

Having a friend or roommate who had been at SU for a year or more was an enormous advantage during the first semester. Several of the transfer students in this study were fortunate enough to be in this situation or to have a roommate who was also a transfer student and thus provided moral support as they found their way around during the first semester.

> It helped me a lot that I had my roommate who knew [her way around] because she had been here. She's in her fifth year in the education school. And before classes started she was nice enough to take me around and show me a few more things. Particulars that I didn't know. (Alice)

> I was so scared and luckily my roommate was also a transfer student so we kind of went through everything together. And we walked around, tried to learn where most things were, that kind of thing. But it was so overwhelming and I think back on it now and it's such a blur. (Kate)

Julie also lived with students who had been at SU for several years, having moved in with teammates from the SU track team. She mentioned that the first week of school when she was confused as to how registration was accomplished, her roommates willingly helped her out, guiding her through the complicated tasks of registering, buying books, and finding her classes.

Thus, a common experience among the transfer students in this study was the feeling of overwhelming disorientation during their first few weeks at SU as they struggled to accomplish the logistical tasks of enrolling as a student at SU, and then feelings of confusion and sometimes frustration during the more lengthy assimilation process, as the students tried to understand the workings of SU's academic and social systems. Several students noted a feeling of urgency associated with this assimilation as

they tried to catch up with their native peers who were two years ahead of them in this process. Finally, students whose assimilation processes went the smoothest were generally those students who had friends or roommates to help them understand the academic and social systems at SU.

Assertion 2

It was difficult for transfer students to make new friends at SU because many friendships among native students were made through the first-year experience when students live in dorms and are open to forming friendships. Lacking the dorm experience, and due to the fact that meeting students in class was difficult, most transfer students who were interested in being involved in SU's social scene made their friends through university-sponsored clubs or activities.

When asked about their social experiences at SU, age emerged from the responses as a significant factor in determining the goals and therefore level of interest among the students in forming social connections at SU. The younger students, students of traditional college age or those in their early twenties, were generally interested in forming a social network at SU. The older students generally already had a social network outside the institution, usually in the form of a spouse and children, and thus were more interested in academic achievement at SU than in forming a network of friends among SU's native students. For the younger students, important issues that emerged were the benefits of having native students as friends or roommates to facilitate forming

social connections, the importance of joining SU clubs and organizations, and the problem of finding time to participate in social activities. A few of the students perceived that attending a community college acted as a barrier to forming friendships and gaining acceptance at SU because of what they perceived as the stigma of attending a community college. For older students, who were less interested in forming friendships, meeting people in class was actually a less difficult task because they were unconcerned with forming connections that extended beyond the classroom. Some older students, however, mentioned the isolation and discomfort they felt at being obviously older than the majority of the students at SU.

For the younger students, who were interested in forming social connections at SU, missing out on the first-year experience was a serious issue. Almost every student in this study, whether in the older or younger group, noted the importance of the "first-year experience" in making social connections at SU. During their first year, SU students live in dorms and have the opportunity to meet large numbers of other students. Because these students are all new to SU, they are interested in forming new friendships. Both Sheila and Christiana underscored the importance of others being open to forming friendships, an openness that has usually dissipated among native students by the time transfer students enter SU as third year students:

> I think we tend to form friendships because we are looking [for friends], and once we have them we tend to quit extending ourselves. I think the kids that are here have quit extending themselves. They have the best of friends; they don't need to add to it. (Sheila)

> I think that some of the younger people might have a harder time transferring to a four-year university. They might feel excluded and might feel they don't belong because these people have been here from the first and second year and they have

> made their initial contacts at the dorm level, and they have that four-year continuity in terms of the social place in the university. (Christiana)

Thus, because most of the native students have formed their friendships by third year, transfer students in this study found it difficult to make friends during class. Sarah noted that in class, students sat in groups with their friends. "There is some connection there [between these friends]. They don't really talk outside of their row." Darby noted that

> All of my friends I know from my job or the Women's Center [where she volunteers], and from [these friends] I might meet other people. I really don't know anybody from my classes. I would definitely say it's difficult to make friends at SU. (Darby)

Many of the younger students experienced frustration and dejection at the difficulties they encountered in trying to form friendships. Darby noted that

> There's no real support network for transfer students. There really is nothing to bind me to people out of class. First-years live in dorms, they have roommates, they have suitemates, they get to know them or they join a sorority or a fraternity. When you come in as a transfer student you usually live off-campus, so you don't have roommates or suitemates … So I would go to class, go to work and go home. It was very lonely. It is just the most utterly lonely thing in the world to be living in a new place, going to a new school, not knowing anybody, not sure how to get to know anybody. It's terrifying. (Darby)

One of the older students remarked that she felt

> like the rest of the transfer students still have a certain amount of resentment perhaps. They are not quite SU students yet for a variety reasons. A lot of it has to do with social – that they are not accepted socially so it hasn't become their own school yet. I think the [transfer students] who suffer are the younger kids. (Sheila)

As in the previous assertion, the benefit of having a previous connection with native SU students or having a connection with another transfer student who is also seeking to form a social network at SU cannot be overstated for those younger transfer students who are interested in making friendships among SU's native students. For

example, Julie lived with teammates from the track team and spent the majority of her time at SU with them and other members of the track team. They practiced together, ate dinner together, competed at meets together, and socialized together. In addition, Julie met her boyfriend through the track team.

> I met a lot of people through the track team. And also, just being on an athletic team is kind of like a celebrity fraternity of its own, so I met a lot of people not even on the track team but through other sports. Soccer, swimming. We eat at the athletic dining hall, so you see the same people every night from all the teams here, so you get to know them. (Julie)

Julie acknowledged that socially she benefited greatly from being on the track team. She noted that

> if you come in as a freshman, everyone's in the same boat and you're around people that are in the same boat as you. Everyone's looking for organizations to join, parties to go to, and what to do on the weekends, social type stuff. It takes you a little bit longer to figure out what's going on as a transfer. I had people on the team help. The team made a conscious effort to introduce me to a lot of people because they knew I wasn't getting that whole experience. But if I came here as a regular transfer I think it would've been a lot harder. (Julie)

Kate, another younger transfer student, lived on campus in upper class housing with a roommate who was also a transfer student. Kate and her roommate met numerous other transfer students at the dorm where they lived.

> Living in the dorm was a blessing because it helped me meet more people. I mean when I first got here, I met another transfer student right off the bat [her roommate]. It helped to have someone who was kind of in the same situation as I was. If I didn't live here, I think it would be really difficult to feel like I was a part of the university community. As a transfer student, I wouldn't have known anybody. (Kate)

While Julie and Kate benefited from their living arrangements, forming friendships at SU for most of the younger students required perseverance and making a concerted effort to get involved in clubs and organizations at SU. Darby noted that,

"unless I chose a club and went to meetings, I would not have been involved socially with anything". Matt described the importance of a religious group at SU that he joined:

> Before I joined [this group], I felt alone. I didn't know anyone in any of my classes. I went to my classes and went home. I have a lot of good friends from [this group]. They really care about you. My friends consoled me when I felt bad about myself last semester. At first I was like, 'Oh my God I'm on probation, it's the end of the world', and I was down on myself, but I had good friends, and it was very comforting. (Matt)

Although the younger students recognized that becoming involved at SU was important to building friendships, they overwhelmingly reported that finding the time to join the clubs they were interested in was difficult. As will be discussed in a later assertion, the academic requirements at SU are much more challenging than what the students had experienced at LCC, requiring additional study time on the part of the transfer students. Furthermore, the majority of participants in this study were supporting themselves through school, and therefore had to work at least 25 hours a week. For example, Sarah noted that her desire to become involved in SU clubs was frustrated by the need to study more than she ever had before and also her need to work long hours during the week:

> If I had time, I would get involved in activities a little more. I work 25 hours a week. I have to spend that time that other students were spending just studying, working. (Sarah)

Finally, when asked if there is a stigma associated with transferring from a community college at SU, many students said yes. This perceived stigma affected primarily the younger transfer students as it was they who were endeavoring to form friendships at SU. However, Brandy, who was in the group of older students, did note that she refrained from mentioning her community college connection if at all possible.

While many of the participants in this study perceived that a stigma existed, it was difficult for many to describe how that stigma was manifested, reporting that it was more of a feeling they had. Jared, however, recounted the following incident:

> I remember I was at a field party at SU, when I was [still a student] at LCC, and there was a band playing, and in one of the breaks between sets I was talking to the guitarist. We had a really good conversation and then he said, 'do you go to SU'? And I said 'no, I go to LCC'. And he said, 'Oh, that's cool.' And literally never said another word to me. (Jared)

Sheila noted that

> the [native] students are careful how they ask me [where she is from] which says to me there is some sensitivity there. You get the "Ohhhh…" I don't hear other transfer students volunteering a lot of times when questioned where they came from. But you do hear the transfer students from other universities volunteering. (Sheila)

Sarah also observed the "oh" response. She, however, interpreted this response as resulting from the fact that the native SU students do not know how to classify community college transfer students because they were different from the typical SU student, rather than as a condescending or negative response.

> There's a guy in one of my classes, and we were talking about where we're from and I mentioned I went to LCC and he said, 'Oh!' It sort of changed the course of the conversation. Later, we were talking after class about sororities and he said, 'I don't know how much you know about that since you went to LCC.' Like from now on it might come up again [between Sarah and her friend] because I went to LCC. It's not anything academic, it's more social. (Sarah)

Whether the perceived stigma exists or not, it obviously affected the younger students in their attempts to form social connections as some felt the need to hide their school of origin, or at least reveal this information hesitantly. In addition, they seemed to brace themselves for the reactions of their native SU peers.

For the older transfer students, the issues related to social interactions at SU were quite different. They generally had previously established social networks with spouses

and children and with members of the Collegetown community, and thus were not necessarily seeking friendships that would extend beyond their academic experiences at SU. While achieving academic success was important to these students, assimilating into the social culture at SU was generally not of great interest to them. Their social activities, thus, involved family members and neighbors rather than native students at SU.

> For me those [social] groups don't have any bearing on my life at all. I don't need to impress anybody; I don't need to find a mate, I've got one. My wife is my social life. (Dennis)

> I will study with people I know from classes, but I don't interact socially with them. The stuff that I do outside of SU is with friends of mine and my husband's [who are] other married people with kids. (Brandy)

Sheila observed that it was actually easier for her to make friends during class at SU because it was obvious to the SU students that she was *not* interested in forming friendships that would extend beyond the classroom.

> I'm much older and I do approach a lot of people in class. It's easier for me to have made that bridge. I'm safe. My relationship will always be 'Hi, how are you doing?'. We are not going to go out drinking together and stuff like that where with students of the same age group that is more of a possibility. (Sheila)

Christiana, represents somewhat of an anomaly among the older students. Christiana did not have family in the area and thus *was* seeking friendships at SU. However, she tended to find her friends, not among the native undergraduate students she encountered in her classes, but among the graduate students and young professionals in the area who were closer to her age and maturity level.

> A lot of my friends are graduate students. I met several of them through my former roommate. Also, by working in town, I've met people who are associated with the university in one way or another. One thing leads to another – you meet someone from the town and they have friends who are in graduate school. My current roommate is a Taiwanese guy working on his engineering masters. (Christiana)

While the majority of the older students were not seeking companions with whom to go bar hopping on the weekends, several of them did express an interest in taking advantage of the numerous clubs and organizations that exist at SU. However, the responsibilities that come with having a family and a job outside the university, as well as the simple geographical issue of living off-campus, often made it difficult for them to make the time to get involved at SU.

> I have a child who takes up a lot of my time in the evening. I don't live on-campus so it's very difficult to travel back and forth. I'm involved in the Parent Teacher Organization at [my child's] school and they have meetings. I think if I were not a mother and I didn't have family responsibilities, then I would get more involved. Because I am a single mother, I don't spend as much time as I would like with my son. There are a lot of seminars and discussions going on [at SU] that I would like to participate in but I feel that I need to spend more time with my child than go to these seminars. I feel it is more important than putting him with a babysitter. (Beth)

While they were not seeking to establish social connections with students in their classes at SU, several of the older students did mention that they felt somewhat uncomfortable at SU due to the difference in age between them and the majority of the undergraduate students at SU. They noted that at LCC, where the student body ranges in age from teenagers to senior citizens, they had felt more comfortable as a student. By contrast, the undergraduate student body at SU is a fairly homogenous group of 18 to 22 year olds, and thus they felt isolated from their peers at SU.

> At LCC I was in courses with people in the same situation as I was – older adults returning to school. Our goals might have been different, but we associated with each other. Here I don't have any of that association. I feel like I stick out like a sore thumb. I don't feel a part of a group. I don't feel any kind of association or relation with other third year students. (Beth)

> I am a bit older than the other students. I have kids at home. I have a husband. When I was at LCC, that is very common. You are among other people who are just like you and have the same concerns and same types of problems that you have. Here there are few other people that are the same age as I am, but most of the time I am in

> with young kids that don't have to worry about getting home to take care of a house and a family. (Brandy)

A few of the transfer students in this study had children who were the same age, or almost the same age, as the majority of students at SU. Dennis noted that his "oldest stepdaughter is 21. I'm used to dealing with people that age. I'm not used to dealing with them as peers. That's a different experience."

This difference in age produced not just discomfort, but also anger at times. Several of the older students reported frustration at being mistaken by students, faculty, and staff at SU for being either a faculty member or a graduate student.

> I have had several experiences at SU where I'll walk into a classroom and be mistaken for a professor or a graduate student or a TA. It happens to me all the time and not just from students, but faculty and staff also. It's frustrating … Being mistaken for a professor or graduate student is kind of irritating sometimes. (Beth)

For students who might already feel conspicuous among their peers, the assumption that they are not part of the undergraduate student body underscores the alienation they already feel as an older student among so many younger students.

Thus, the participants in this study fell into two distinct groups in their social interactions at SU: younger students who were interested in forming social connections and SU, and older students who generally already had strong social networks outside of SU. The younger students faced obstacles in their endeavors to make friendships at SU such as missing out on the first-year dorm experience, lacking the time needed to become involved in SU clubs, and the perceived stigma of attending a community college. The older students, while not interested in forming social connections outside of the academic realm, struggled to feel a part of SU due to the difference in age between their peers and themselves.

Assertion 3

LCC transfer students viewed students at the SU as being financially and socially privileged and taking these privileges for granted. They were, however, impressed at how academically motivated and committed the SU students were.

When asked about their opinions of the SU student body as a whole, the participants in this study almost uniformly mentioned a large difference in socioeconomic background between students at LCC and those at SU. Although this perception on the part of the transfer students may have been a generalization that did not apply to all SU students, it colored the perceptions that the transfer students had of their native peers. They believed that as a result of coming from financially privileged families that also provided strong emotional support and guidance, the native SU students had the self-confidence that enabled them to set and achieve high goals for themselves. On the other hand, these same advantages also rendered some native students, in the eyes of the participants, arrogant and cocky. The participants believed, by contrast, that the students at LCC, in general, had experienced more strife and hardship in their lives, and often lacked the financial and emotional support from their families that their native peers enjoyed. While, according to the participants, LCC students often set their goals lower than their native student peers as a result of this perceived difference, they also had gained from their experiences a greater level of maturity and a broader view of the various socioeconomic strata of society than their native peers. While the LCC transfer students disdained their native peers for their shallow view of the world and their arrogant

attitudes, they were, however, impressed with their academic motivation and dedication, a single mindedness that they perceived as lacking in many of their LCC peers.

The perceived difference in socioeconomic background between the students at LCC and those at SU was a common theme among the twelve participants in this study. Participants in the study compared LCC and SU students as follows: students at LCC paid their own way through school, worked full-time jobs, often had families to care for, and thus fit their classes into their schedules as best they could amid their other responsibilities. By contrast, the students at SU, by and large, were being supported by their parents while they were in school, and thus many did not work at all, or worked only to make spending money. In addition to the perception that many SU students had never struggled financially, many of the transfer students also believed that native SU students came from emotionally secure families in which they received a great deal of love and support.

> Traditional [SU students] have strong support from somewhere. I can't say exactly whether it be parents, guardians or something that happened in their lives that made them take charge. But I think they have a support system from somewhere. (Brandy)

Together, the combination of financial privilege and familial support contributed, in the minds of the transfer students, to a strong sense of self-confidence among the SU students.

> Students at SU are more cocky about their ability to do the work. They don't have more ability, they just have more self confidence ... They are not afraid of it. They've never been slammed by anything. (Dennis)

> The students at SU are much more self-assured. It's obvious many of these kids were well loved, well cared for, well schooled, well whatever. (Sheila)

This self-confidence in their abilities allowed the SU students, according to study participants, to set high expectations and goals for themselves. Several transfer students noted that the students at SU expect to be financially and professionally successful, that they set higher goals for themselves than students at LCC.

> I think [SU students] expect a lot more in terms of what they'll do after school, like getting a job and succeeding in life. (Julie)

> [SU students] feel they are more in control of their destiny than a lot of the students at LCC which I can say for myself because when I started at LCC I didn't have the faintest idea where I was going to go with it, what I was going to do. I think students starting here may not necessarily know right in the first year what they are going to do, but I think they also have a pretty good idea. (Brandy)

Because of their financial privilege, SU students were perceived by the transfer students as being blasé and offhand about money, an attitude that to the transfer students, many of whom lived paycheck to paycheck, was astonishing.

> At SU people's parents provide everything. A lot have their own computers, a lot don't have to work. They have money, so money is not that big a deal because their parents provide. But at LCC people have to work, they weren't spoiled. (Matt)

> Even if they don't necessarily do it consciously, [SU students] let on that they have this money and they go places. In my Spanish class, we were talking about what people were doing for Spring Break. I was just sitting there laughing to myself because everyone was like "I'm going to Florida, I'm going to San Francisco"... and I'm staying here working. (Alice)

This perceived self-confidence in their abilities and casual attitude in regard to financial issues on the part of SU students were interpreted by several of the transfer students as snobbery and condescension.

> There is a much greater sense of entitlement [among SU students]. 'I am after all in the top 10% of my class and I am God's gift to whatever it is we are going to be doing'. (Sheila)

As another manifestation of this snobbery, SU students were perceived by some transfer students as isolating themselves from the local people in town who were not members of the SU community. One of the students in the study, Sarah, was dating a man who worked in Collegetown as a car salesman and was not in any way affiliated with the university. Her SU friends looked askance at this relationship. Sarah recounted the following conversation:

> When I talk to my friends [about my boyfriend] they say, 'you're going to be supporting him eventually', but that's not true. I guess they would assume he's like working at the local music store.

When asked if her friends were kidding or serious, she responded, "I think it was half of each. 'Oh, no, what's she got herself into', that kind of thing." Sheila also reported a sense of separation between the students and the local townspeople. She observed the following:

> One thing that makes me very unhappy is that students tend to treat the staff as though they are not human. I find that very disturbing. You can look at the janitorial staff and they will barely look up. And all you have to do is say hello to them once.

Whether these perceptions were accurate or not, the transfer students regarded SU students with envy and a measure of resentment; envy because SU students were able to focus their energy and attention on their studies rather than being distracted by outside responsibilities, and resentment because they felt the SU students did not realize how fortunate they were. To the LCC students, it appeared as if the SU students did not realize that not everyone lived the type of life they did. While the LCC students did not begrudge the SU students the comfortable life to which they were accustomed, the LCC students would have liked the SU students to be aware of the difficulties encountered and overcome by many community college students in achieving their educational goals.

> I've really fought to be here at SU, and I really wanted to be here, and all these kids didn't have to battle very much. It was kind of a natural progression of events that brought them here. (Christiana)

> I've seen so many students at LCC struggling to make ends meet, going from a job to kids to night classes. They take classes at night, go back home and start all over again. It seems some of these [SU] students do take it for granted. (Brandy)

Because of the perceived differences in background and experiences, LCC students described themselves as more realistic about the practical aspects of getting by in the world. Also, because they had generally worked full-time and/or had children, LCC students perceived themselves as more mature than the students at SU who generally have come to SU straight out of high school.

> [SU students] haven't had much contact with sheer, abject poverty. Even though [LCC students] live in an industrialized country, they are very aware of that. They know what it feels like to live paycheck to paycheck, go hungry, be one step away from homelessness. The community college students have a first hand awareness of society and they are more practically savvy about the realities of life, realities of human relationships. SU students have never experienced anxiety and the people at LCC understand that. The people at LCC are living it. (Christiana)

> You and I are sitting here and we are not even concerned about eating tonight or where we are going to sleep tonight. We take it for granted. Same thing. [SU students] haven't a clue that there might be something different. (Sheila)

While the LCC students might be more in touch with problems facing many in our society, SU students, by contrast, because of their family background, were perceived as more sophisticated and cultured. They had traveled and been exposed to different cultures.

> The students [at SU] have a sophistication that the people in community college in general do not have. When it comes to the areas we study, these kids make more connections in terms of foreign affairs, history, political systems, international markets,
> etc. They are more aware and have different tastes in entertainment, and they look at entertainment and the media in a different way than the community college people do. (Christiana)

Finally, while the LCC students thought that many SU students were arrogantly offhand about financial matters and oblivious in regards to socioeconomic issues, they were impressed with the seriousness with which the SU students approached their studies. Several noted that the students at SU worked much harder than those at LCC and were much more interested in the subject matter in their courses. They were better prepared in coming to class and were more willing to participate in discussions during the discussion sections of large lecture classes or in those classes at SU that were small enough to permit such interactions.

> The students at SU are much more academically oriented. They really care about their grades and everything. Everyone here is so much more into their work. (Kate)

> You have a lot more people [at SU] that are serious about what they're learning. Since you have so many choices here, people take classes because they want to and they're just more interested in learning here. They seem more enthusiastic about it. Everybody's more involved in discussions. (Julie)

Because of the SU students' more serious attitude toward school, the LCC students often stated that while they were overwhelmed by the workload at SU, they were much more intellectually stimulated at SU than LCC.

Thus, the transfer students had distinct, and for the most part, similar impressions of the native SU students: they saw native students as coming from financially privileged and emotionally supportive families. Because of this privileged background, these students had the self-confidence that allowed them to achieve the high goals they set for themselves, but also rendered some of them, in the opinion of the transfer students, arrogant and overbearing. The transfer students saw themselves, by contrast, as having

faced more hardships in life, and thus as more mature and grounded in the realities of life than the native students.

It is interesting to note the sweeping generalizations made by the transfer students in describing the native students at SU. While indeed there probably were more students of a higher socioeconomic background at SU than at LCC, certainly there were also native students who did not come from well-off families. In addition, just because some SU students come from well-off families, it is not fair to assume that those families provided a more nurturing upbringing than that received by LCC students from less financially privileged families. Also, while in general it was probably true that LCC students have experienced more hardships than the native SU students, Christiana's statement that SU students "have never experienced anxiety" was certainly over-reaching.

Finally, despite the general disdain with which the transfer students regarded the native students, the transfer students were nonetheless impressed with the academic dedication and abilities of the native SU students. The intensity with which the native students approached their studies served as motivation for the transfer students to raise their academic abilities to a higher level and, for some transfer students, increased their enjoyment of their academic experiences at SU. The increased academic rigor, as well as the differences in pedagogy the transfer students encountered at SU form the basis of the next two assertions.

Assertion 4

The courses at SU were much more demanding than at LCC, especially in their writing and reading requirements, one result of which was a competitive atmosphere among the SU students.

The academic abilities and motivation that the transfer students so admired in the native students were a great advantage to those students in succeeding academically at SU. Without exception, the transfer students in this study reported an increased academic rigor in their courses at SU as compared to their courses at LCC. This increased difficulty resulted from both increased amounts of work required of the students, as well as from an increased quality of work expected of them. The difficulty transfer students experienced in their SU courses was reflected in a drop in GPA experienced by each student in the study after the first semester at SU. Finally, the increased difficulty of the coursework at SU engendered strong competition among SU students for high grades and a reluctance among SU students to work with other students to achieve success in a course. This self-centered approach to academic work was a shock to the LCC students who were accustomed to the noncompetitive, collaborative atmosphere of LCC.

When asked to give a general description of their first semester at SU, many of the study participants expressed an overall sense of bewilderment and shock at the level of performance expected from them at SU:

> Academically I was prepared, but I wasn't prepared for the atmosphere and for the competition. I thought, OK, classes will probably be harder, and I was prepared for that, but I just wasn't prepared for the atmosphere at all. I envisioned it would be more difficult, but it was such culture shock, it really was. (Darby)

Chief among the reasons for this initial shock was a significant increase in both the amount of work assigned and the level of performance expected from the students compared to what they had experienced at LCC. For example, the students noted the increased amount of reading and writing that was expected of them at SU.

> Where at LCC you might be asked to write a 2 to 3 page paper, [at SU] it's 6 to 8 pages on the same subject. (Dennis)

> I'm devoting a lot more time to studying for the courses than I used to. My studying time has doubled in reading and doing exercises. (Beth)

Compare the above comments to the students' descriptions of their courses at LCC:

> At LCC, I didn't have to spend that much time outside of school doing homework. At SU, there is more reading, and you have to write a lot more; that takes a lot of time. (Matt)

> [For one class at LCC], we had to read a couple books and I barely skimmed those books, maybe I read a chapter. When the test came around I did great. I got an A and I didn't do anything for the class, really. Here [at SU] it's a different level, I haven't been that lackadaisical in any classes here. (Jared)

The increased amount of work required of SU students is also reflected in the fact that SU professors expected students to read and understand material that was assigned but not discussed during class time. At LCC, by contrast, most students reported that the material covered during class was the same material that would appear on the test, allowing them to perform well on tests without doing any of the assigned reading.

> At LCC, the teachers would lecture on everything that would be on the test, so if you understood the lecture you did fine on the test. At SU, in contrast, the teacher will lecture but they don't cover everything that's on the test. At LCC, the teachers just lectured on what was important, and the tests were similar to the lecture and there wouldn't be any surprises. (Matt)

> In my biology class at LCC I learned an enormous amount, but I could basically ignore the book and read my class notes and get an A on the exam. Here that would never be enough. If I don't do the reading, I will not get a passing grade. (Christiana)

In addition to an increased volume of work for each class, the students were also expected to produce a higher quality of work, often in a shorter period of time. The comment below is exemplary of the comments made by several of the study participants.

> Memorizing and being able to spit it back wasn't going to give me the answer. I had to have the second ability to say 'what does this mean?' in order to answer the question correctly. I had to do more analytical thinking. I caught on that the way to study for this is not to memorize it but to look at what was the point of him telling us this? Why did he give us this case? What is important here? What do I need to draw from this? (Sheila)

In addition to demonstrating their analytical abilities on tests, SU students were also required to display these abilities during discussion groups that accompanied many of the large lecture courses at SU.

> Last semester when I was taking the American Authors class [at SU] it was just overwhelming to me how everyone was so in to the discussion and interpreting the books and the authors and that kind of thing. And I had never done that before. You have to be able to express your intelligence verbally [at SU]. That was kind of difficult for me. (Kate)

The difficulty of the courses at SU compared to those at LCC is evidenced by the fact that all twelve of the students interviewed reported a drop in GPA their semester at SU from what they earned at LCC. Brandy and Kate both noted their disappointment and frustration at the drop in their GPAs:

> At SU my GPA went down [from 3.8] so now I'm like a 2.6. I took that as a personal blow. (Brandy)

> [My GPA dropping] was really kind of like a humbling experience, and my parents certainly were not happy and I was not happy at all. My parents have always been supportive but I think that unless you're actually here you don't understand, you don't really comprehend how hard it is. You know, I've made good grades all my life so why can't I make them here? (Kate)

On the whole, however, while the students were disappointed with their drop in GPA, they were resigned to having a lower GPA at SU than at LCC, recognizing the increased difficulty of the courses at SU.

The students pointed to the increased difficulty of the courses at SU as an important cause for the competitive tension between students at SU that was not present at LCC. Because the competitive atmosphere at SU was markedly different from the relaxed and cooperative atmosphere at LCC, many students indicated that adjusting to the distrustful and self-protective attitudes of the students at SU was a significant factor in their transition. Whereas at LCC they could look to fellow students for help and encouragement in their coursework, at SU they much more often had to cope with course-related problems without the help of fellow students.

> At LCC, I studied in groups all the time. But in biology classes at SU, people seemed less friendly. They weren't as willing to help, because, God forbid, you might do better than them. And everything was a scale and a competition, and I didn't like that atmosphere. At LCC, the teacher would love to give everyone As, but at SU only a certain amount of people can get As, so people were less likely to help. My microbiology teacher, the attitude he established was, you are competing against everyone in the room, and this is going to be a tough, tough class, and if you don't like it, just get out right now. At LCC, it was completely laid back, people were friendly and more willing to help each other. One time I asked this one guy [at SU] to borrow his notes and he said, 'they're at home', but the way he said that I wondered, 'is he really telling the truth?' If I asked someone at LCC, even if they did not have them, they would bring them to the next class. (Matt)

> SU students are definitely more competitive. We [she and another LCC student] found it difficult to find other people to study with. So we went and talked to the professor about that, and the professor said that [other students in the class] want to make sure that anything they find out that they can use without giving anyone else the edge. (Sarah)

Learning to cope with the competitive attitudes of the SU students became an important part of a larger lesson of the transition process, that of becoming more self-

dependent. While at LCC they could rely on help from their fellow students, at SU they often were left to struggle with course-related difficulties on their own. This theme of learning to do for themselves is one that will reappear in numerous ways throughout the students' SU experiences, including in the next assertion.

Assertion 5

The teaching-focused mission of LCC, as well as the small size of the institution, allowed the LCC faculty to focus on the academic progress of their students. By contrast, students at SU, because of its larger size and its mission that emphasizes research in addition to teaching, received less direct contact with their professors and were required to be much more self-directed. This difference in academic culture between the two institutions can potentially create transition difficulties for community college transfer students.

One important difference that each of the study participants noted between LCC and SU was the decreased amount of interaction between SU faculty and students as compared to their experiences at LCC. This reduced interaction resulted from several factors: the traditional formality of the SU faculty compared to the easygoing demeanor of the LCC faulty, the larger size of SU, and the difference in missions between the two institutions. While LCC faculty are meant to devote the majority of their time to

teaching, the faculty at SU must divide their efforts between teaching and research. The LCC faculty, thus, are able to spend greater amounts of time teaching and advising their students; they also recognize and respond to student needs by modifying the amount and types of course content. Because of the decreased attention SU students receive from their faculty, these students are required to be more self-directed in their learning, a skill that will serve them well throughout life. Several of the transfer students, in fact, wondered if perhaps by being so accessible to their students the LCC faculty actually hindered rather than helped their students' intellectual growth.

The decreased interaction between faculty and students at SU, although not unexpected by the transfer students, was nonetheless a difference between their academic experiences at LCC and SU to which they had to adjust. This decreased interaction resulted from several distinct differences between LCC and SU. The first of these differences was the approach the faculty at SU took towards their students as compared to their counterparts at LCC: while the professors at LCC tended to be relaxed and informal in their interactions with students, the faculty at SU were generally formal and distant.

> The professors conduct themselves with a certain difference. They are more formal. A lot of the [faculty] who are here come from very prestigious universities where this idea of formality is the norm so they learned by observing and how they were treated. I have lots of professors who attended Harvard, Oxford and Yale, very prestigious and historically formal institutions. (Christiana)

> Academics are much more formal here. What I mean is a teacher is a teacher, and you respect that. It's almost as if they are further away from us, and in doing so it seems like they're on a pedestal and it's intimidating. I mean at LCC you knew where their office was, they'd be eating in the cafeteria, I mean it was so much more relaxed. (Darby)

Darby particularly missed the personal nature of the faculty-student interaction because this interaction that she experienced at LCC made her feel like an individual rather than a

nameless, faceless student in a crowd of students. To Darby, this interaction is exemplified by the fact that professors at LCC called their students by name.

> My teachers knew our names. I mean that is something so trivial, but it's something so nice. I mean, I would definitely say our teachers [at LCC] got to know our personalities, like who asked questions, who sat in the front, who sat in the back. If you run into him in the hallway, you talk for fifteen minutes. And you just do not have that at SU. They just don't know your name.

From Darby's point of view, the separation between faculty and student that resulted from the faculty's formality underscored and served to emphasize a difference in hierarchy between faculty and students. She noted that:

> At SU, you definitely feel that [the professors] are not a person, they are a teacher, that's all they are, you are a lowly student. Whereas at LCC I felt I was much more equal with them. I could discuss things not of the classroom with them. I can't do that with my teachers here. Your teachers [at LCC], yes they have more knowledge than you, but they are your equals.

Another reason for the difference in personalized instruction, of course, was the difference in size between the classes at LCC versus those at SU. It would be understandably much more difficult for a faculty member to take an active interest in the academic progress of each student in a class of five hundred as compared to a faculty member at LCC who might have five classes of twenty-five students. This large class size, although not unexpected, was, again, a difficult adjustment for some students.

> The class sizes are huge, you know. And here it was such a shock to walk into my biology class and have two hundred plus students. I'm sure I knew that it would be a large class, but actually experiencing it was very different. (Kate)

> There were three hundred or four hundred people in that [SU psychology] class. My psychology class at LCC had seven students. So if you don't understand something you ask it right there. You interact with the professor. Here it was just completely different. I guess I had a hard time adjusting to that. (Jared)

As Jared noted, because the classes were small at LCC, the students were able to interact with their professors a great deal more than at SU.

> We didn't always accomplish in one class what the professor wanted to do just because we're more involved. More interaction. Here we just basically sit through a sixty to seventy-five minute lecture with no interaction with each other or the professor. With a small class size I think you are less inhibited to ask questions or make statements, or ask the professor about things you need them to explain. It's more intimidating when you have a hundred students than when you have fifteen. (Beth)

> In a three hundred and fifty student classroom, no one spoke up. A kid once told me he liked the way I spoke up in class. These students come from classes with three hundred, four hundred, or five hundred and are not expected to talk. And a lot of them are very bright kids and have something to add and something to say. And it's never been OK. (Sheila)

A third reason for the decreased interaction between faculty and students at SU was the difference in missions between LCC and SU. The faculty at LCC, because LCC is primarily a teaching institution, carry a much higher teaching load than the faculty at SU, and devote the majority of their time to working with students. By contrast, the mission at SU includes both teaching and research, and thus the faculty at SU divide their time between these two functions. Several of the students in this study, in fact, felt that perhaps research was of greater importance to many of the faculty at SU than teaching.

> Some of [the faculty] I get the feeling would rather be researching and publishing. They have publishing pressures to obtain tenure, and they need to have projects going on the side to bring prestige to the university. They have these other pressures that community college professors don't have. (Christiana)

Because of LCC's teaching mission, not only were the LCC faculty able to interact to a greater degree with their students during class, the LCC faculty also demonstrated a commitment to helping their students succeed that was less evident

among SU faculty. The transfer students reported that LCC faculty would often spend time both during and outside class to help their students.

At LCC the teachers really want to help you out, it's so clear. (Matt)

As a result of the faculty's obvious interest in the academic success of their students, the LCC students felt more comfortable seeking help from the faculty whether it be in or out of class.

> I would have an easier time going up to a teacher at LCC and asking them questions or asking if I could turn in something later or at a different time than I could at SU. (Julie)

Another example of the LCC faculty's responsiveness to their students that was possible because of LCC's teaching mission was the faculty's greater flexibility with course content. Because faculty interacted with their students, they were able to learn their interests and academic needs. The LCC faculty, thus, were able to adjust their courses to include information pertinent to the students' interests or to cover material more slowly if needed by their students.

> At LCC we could help structure the class. Like if we have few people in the class who are nurses, a teacher might take a few minutes and mention something extra. Whereas at SU, it's [pause] everything is solid, it's set in stone, you have no choice whatsoever, what you have to learn is set in stone. Whereas at LCC it was much more flexible. And that made it more interesting. (Darby)

> Yeah, one of my English teachers at LCC was always adjusting the syllabus because we got on too many, like too many discussions on one thing. And he would take something out. He was more willing to do that I think than here. I have a class at SU, and the teacher wants to get everything in before the end of the semester. He adjusted it a little bit, but he really didn't take too much out. (Sarah)

Because the SU faculty's time is split between teaching and research, they devote less time to teaching and holding office hours, and thus are less accessible to the students.

> Professors are more accessible at LCC. After class at LCC you could always walk up and clarify some things. Office hours [at SU] are always during a period when you've got classes or like me I have to work. Office hours are often not convenient for me. (Dennis)

> I'd e-mail my professor and she'd get back to me a week, two weeks later. She got a hundred e-mails in a week. And during office hours, you sit around a table with 20 other people. Whereas at LCC, you go in and usually they're happy to see you. (Jared)

However, several students in this study reported that while the SU faculty might be formal during class and less accessible outside of class, the SU faculty were, to the surprise of the students, quite willing to be of help during office hours.

> Actually [the SU faculty] were receptive to talking to me. Very friendly. They seemed like they wanted to be helpful and actually cared about what happened to their students in their classes. And not just like I gave you the lecture, now leave me alone. That was good because I had been used to having access to my professors. (Brandy)

> I was surprised because I thought at SU if I had a problem I'd be all by myself, but the teachers have office hours too, so you can get help. (Matt)

The need to seek professors out during office hours to get questions and problems addressed underscores another important difference between LCC and SU: students must be much more self-directed and self-motivated at SU than at LCC. At LCC, if students had questions they could generally get them answered during or right after class. However, at SU, students must take the initiative to go see their professor during office hours. Kate notes that:

> You have to kind of make yourself go to office hours. I mean nobody's gonna make you. You know, the instructor's not going to call you and say, 'Please come to my office hours'. (Kate)

The need to be self-directed at SU applies not just to coursework, but also to planning a curriculum of study. The students' experiences with advising at SU differed greatly from what they had experienced at LCC. At LCC, advisors took a personal

interest in the progress of their advisees and spent time guiding them through the LCC curriculum, taking into consideration the requirements of the students' intended transfer institutions. In addition, advisors at LCC tend to take a more holistic approach to advising, inquiring about personal and work-related factors in the student's life as well as focusing on his/her academic needs.

> At LCC, [advisors] realize you have a life outside of school. Whenever I went in they wouldn't just say, 'these are the courses you take', they would ask, 'are you working, are you married, are you single, do you live in town, do you commute'? When I told them I was working full-time and I commuted, they said, 'you may not want to take a full load of classes, it will be real hard on you'. My advisor was great. (Darby)

At SU, by contrast, the students felt that their advisors were less interested in their academic and professional goals, and not at all interested in their personal lives. They missed the personal attention they had received at LCC. The faculty advisors at SU were available should students have questions, but in general they did not spend time planning out a course of study with each student.

> My faculty advisor was okay, I suppose. He just wasn't very interested in knowing about me and he just was there to sign off, really. He suggested I take five classes instead of four. He thought I was low on credits. It was kind of a hasty decision, he was looking at the quick fix or whatever and not knowing who I was or whatever, just not really caring. Just looking at the numbers or whatever. (Alice)

> [At SU] my advising has been limited to going to see my faculty advisor and having him sign off on my registration cards. He asked if I knew what classes I wanted to take. I said 'yes' and he said 'OK' and that was it. (Brandy)

Because advising was less personal at SU than at LCC, the transfer students were required to take greater initiative in order to accomplish the tasks associated with registration and planning a course of study.

> The advising process at SU forces you to be more assertive or more self-directed: if you don't look for these things, they will not come to you. At LCC they took care of us a little bit more. (Christiana)

In addition to the greater interest the LCC faculty seemed to take in their advisees, the LCC faculty were also willing to devote more time to their advisees. Accessibility to advisors, in the minds of the students at least, was greatly reduced at SU. In general they saw their advisors only at registration time when the advisor was required to sign their registration card.

> At LCC you could just drop by and see them [advisors] at any time. I guess accessibility was a difference. (Jared)

It should be noted that, while all of the student participants felt that advising was less personal at SU than at LCC, the students in the study generally fell into one of two categories. They either felt the advising at SU was less personal than that at LCC but did not particularly care, or they were distinctly dissatisfied with the fact that advising was less personal at SU. Students in the first category did not have much to say on the subject of advising, as on the whole their experiences at SU, while less personal than at LCC, suited their needs. Their satisfaction with the advising at SU stems from the fact that, while they did observe advising to be more personal at LCC, they did not feel this personal approach to advising was necessary to their success at LCC, an attitude they retained in transferring to SU.

Julie represents an anomaly among the students in this study in regards to advising because, as a student athlete, she received both a faculty advisor and advising through the athletic department. Because the SU athletic department closely advises its athletes, her experience with advising at SU was much the same as her experience at LCC.

While students generally appreciated the student-centered teaching and advising they had experienced at LCC, several noted that perhaps the faculty at LCC were too

willing to help their students. They wondered if perhaps the students at LCC came to rely too much on the faculty rather than learning to be independent and self-directed thinkers.

> [LCC faculty] do coddle the students; I don't know if it's too much. I guess some of them really need it. (Brandy)

> LCC, I felt, was very similar to high school. I mean, it was good to get one-on-one help, but it seemed like I was with another high school teacher. That's how they kind of pulled you along and I think at SU you're forced to work a little bit more on your own, try to figure out stuff more on your own. I guess you're just forced to act more on your own [at SU] while you're babied a lot more [at LCC]. (Julie)

Thus, while the student-centered focus of LCC faculty greatly benefits some students who might need the extra guidance, several students questioned whether it really helped the students who transfer to rigorous universities such as SU where they are thrown in with a large number of academically advanced students and expected to be independent and self-directed.

In summary, one of the most striking pedagogic differences noted by students in this study between LCC and SU was the decreased interaction between faculty and students at SU as compared to LCC. This decreased interaction resulted from the formality of the SU faculty, the larger size of SU classes, and the difference in mission between LCC and SU. While LCC faculty focused the majority of their efforts on teaching, the SU faculty divided their time between teaching and research. As a result, LCC faculty were more personally involved in the academic progress of their students in regards to coursework and advising, were more accessible to students outside of class, and were more responsive to the needs of their students, as evidenced by the flexibility of their course content depending on student needs and interests. However, several of the students in the study wondered if this type of personalized instruction actually benefited

community college students who transfer to rigorous four-year colleges and universities. While the one-on-one instruction and easy access to faculty guidance was intellectually enjoyable and definitely facilitated their learning while at LCC, the transfer students were forced quite suddenly, upon transfer to an institution such as SU, to function in a much more independent and self-directed manner. Their peers at SU had had two years with which to adjust to this type of instruction, while the LCC students had to quickly adjust to this new means of learning. One result of this sudden change in teaching methodology was the academic struggles and the drop in GPA the transfer students experienced their first semester at SU. Several students wondered if it might not have been better for the transfer students, from a practical if not pedagogic standpoint, if their faculty at LCC had been more like the faculty at SU so that the adjustment to the academic procedures at SU would not have been so severe.

Assertion 6

Administrators at the four-year institution appeared to underestimate the difficulties inherent in the transition process experienced by transfer students.

While the two administrators at SU interviewed for this study appeared to be earnest in their desire to help transfer students acclimate to SU, they underestimated the difficulties of this experience. The two administrators interviewed for this study were those who have the most contact with transfer students: Dean O, who plans the Transfer Student Orientation Program, and Dean A, who serves as the transfer students' advisor

until they declare a major. Both the actions and the comments of these two administrators reveal a discrepancy between what the deans perceive as the pertinent transition issues and what the students in this study actually reported. In general, the deans are unaware of the difficulty of this process. The orientation program planned by Dean O lasts only the first week of the semester even though she recognizes that many community college students might not be sufficiently acclimated after one week's orientation. After this point, Dean O advocates a sink or swim policy for the transfer students. Dean A takes this same self-directed approach in advising the transfer students.

Both deans make the mistake of viewing the transfer students in terms of the deans' experiences with the native students at SU. The transfer students, however, generally arrive at SU with a significantly different family and educational background than most of the native students. Regarding their educational background, the transfer students come from a smaller institution where the academic standards were not quite as rigorous and where personal contact with both faculty and advisors was the norm. In addition, they differ from the native students in not benefiting from the first-year experience. This experience consists of both an official and unofficial orientation program that lasts much of the first year. Officially, Dean O and other student affairs personnel provide a week of orientation programs for the incoming first-year students. The unofficial aspect of the "first-year experience" consists of the year spent living in a dormitory with other first-year students. As mentioned earlier, the friendships established among dorm-mates that first year often last throughout the students' four years at SU. Also, each floor of the dormitory is assigned one or two resident advisors, upper-class students who serve as a resource for the first-year students throughout the year. Transfer

students, by contrast, receive the official orientation but lack the dormitory experience, and thus are required to discern the workings of the SU social system and make social connections on their own. Between the sink or swim mentality of the administration and the reduced opportunity to make social connections, the transfer students have a much more difficult transition to life at SU than did the native students, a fact that administrators do not seem to recognize.

The deans' view of transfer students as similar to native students is illustrated in the following comment by Dean O. She noted that because SU is a highly selective institution it tends to attract

> students who are capable of doing things on their own and don't need as much individual attention. We are set up in a much more independent kind of way [than community colleges] so that we expect the students to come, to take care of themselves, to be initiating.

This self-directed approach can been seen in Dean O's planning and design of the transfer orientation program. As mentioned above this program lasts only a week, at the end of which time the transfer students are expected to fend for themselves at SU.

It should be noted that the orientation program itself was well-received by the transfer students. The majority of the students in this study who attended part or all of the transfer orientation found it to be helpful and appreciated the efforts exerted by the administration to acclimate them to the new environment.

> The orientation activities were all great. I wish I could have gone to all of them, but I had to work. It basically covered what SU offers as far as everything from bus services, student health, all the other things that would be different, that aren't the standard go to school, get your books, and study. (Dennis)

> The orientations were very helpful. There was one big overall orientation with Dean A, and that gave us a lot of information, and during orientation is when I got my e-mail address and ID card. That was very helpful. (Brandy)

Confidence in the transfer students' comments regarding the helpfulness of the orientation program was affirmed by observations of two of the orientation sessions: the large group nontraditional student meeting and the academic orientation with Dean A.

As noted by several of the nontraditional students in this study, the large nontraditional transfer student meeting presented useful information to older students who were new to Collegetown and SU. The TSPAs sat together in the front of the auditorium, and formed a rowdy group, talking and laughing easily with each other. Each TSPA was assigned to speak for about five to ten minutes on topics such as SU libraries, gyms and sporting events, student health, and the student newspaper. The TSPAs had each prepared their topics in advance, and often had brochures and telephone numbers for the various groups or offices they were presenting. The TSPAs had obviously made a conscious effort to think about what kind of information the new transfer students would need. Several of the TSPAs noted whether spouses and children were eligible for various services at SU related to their assigned topic.

The atmosphere of the meeting was informal. Often TSPAs other than the one speaking would interject comments to elaborate on whatever topic was being discussed, thus the meeting was a true team effort. As a result of the informal, friendly atmosphere, the transfer students seemed quite comfortable asking questions throughout the meeting. Thus, it seemed the TSPAs made a concerted effort to provide the transfer students the information they needed in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere.

The academic orientation with Dean A was well attended. Dean A presented information on such academic procedures as add/drop, verifying credits from transfer

institutions, declaring a major, and final registration. Though the information presented by Dean A was important, it was also dull, and the atmosphere in the room quickly became lethargic. The audience did, however, perk up when Dean A offered the practical information of how to get into a full class and then opened the floor to questions. While this meeting provided important information needed by transfer students related to their academic careers at SU, Dean A's presentation was limited almost entirely to important dates and registering procedures. He did not speak to the transfer students about academic differences they might encounter as they began their coursework at SU. This meeting could have been enhanced by covering such issues as large lecture courses, discussion sections, how to contact your TAs and professors, and how to manage your time to successfully manage the heavy workload at SU.

On the whole, however, the two sessions described above corroborate statements made by the transfer students during their interviews as to the helpfulness of the Orientation Program. The nontraditional student meeting provided important information in a relaxed and informal manner, while Dean A's meeting also provided useful information although in a less personal manner.

While the activities that made up the orientation program were of great help to the transfer students, they only lasted one week, and given the large change in academic and social culture at SU compared to LCC, the students' transition needs cannot be met in this short amount of time. Several of the students suggested extending the length of the orientation activities beyond the first week of the semester, but Dean O offered the following rationale for why orientation activities only occur during the first week:

> We hope that from the resources that are established during the beginning [orientation program], students will get to know other students and will begin to feel comfortable going out, stepping out from orientation on their own in the university, and when they don't, they'll know who to call. Part of the general philosophy of working with transfers over the years is to help them know what the resources are and use them like any other student would. We expect that they would get to know their academic advisors and use them, and then if there are problems or concerns that they don't know where to go or any of those things fail them, then we encourage them to come here.

The idea that a student could become sufficiently aware of the resources available at SU within the first week to then be self-sufficient seems unrealistic, especially for community college students who are accustomed to a more hands-on approach from college administrators and faculty.

Dean O did recognize that the transition difficulties are not all resolved for students by the orientation program:

> After orientation, I think the next part of the transition has to do with when all the flurry of the beginning of school activities settles, and it's Saturday night, and you're sitting in your apartment and it's quiet, and you wish you had something to do, but aren't quite sure how to do it or who to do it with. And that I think is where some work needs to be done.

Given that the dean recognized the need for a more prolonged orientation period for some transfer students, it is surprising that she has not taken steps to prolong the orientation program for those students who are interested.

In reference to the orientation program, it should be noted while most students stated that the activities of the week were beneficial to them, a few students were put off by the separation the organizers made between the traditional and nontraditional students. While Dennis and Beth appreciated being assigned to the nontraditional age group of transfer students, Sheila was offended by being placed in the nontraditional age orientation group.

> Anything that said non-traditional age such as coffees, etc. I refused to go. Because that isn't the main issue. Yes, I'm part of the non-traditional age. I also happen to have many things that are non-traditional about me. Why would I pick on age as something I want to pick on? How about non-traditional age people who are really crummy at taking notes? Or really good at whatever? Age was not the thing that made any difference to me and there was no way I wanted to get together with a group of people that felt that age made the biggest difference here. (Sheila)

Also, while Sarah was placed with the traditional age students during orientation, she told of a friend who was slightly older and thus placed with the nontraditional age students.

> He was put in the nontraditionally aged group. And he was so out of it because everyone in there was talking about child care and finding rides for their children to school. He doesn't have kids, he still lives with his parents, so he didn't go to most of the orientation things. (Sarah)

Because of these students' negative experiences with the orientation program, perhaps the administration should ask incoming students aged 24 and older if they would like to be placed with the nontraditional students, rather than simply assigning them to that group.

Another example of Dean O's lack of understanding is Dean O's contention that the orientation program served as a means of establishing friendships for the transfer students. She acknowledged that :

> as a transfer [student], you are trying to break into a system where people don't really feel the need to have new friendships in quite the same way as they did when everybody was new. A lot of times, transfer students end up having friends who are other transfer students because they are new too. And they get to know each other during orientation when they are open and they are looking for friendships.

However, a week's worth of orientation is a poor substitute for a year spent living with other new students in a dorm (the first-year experience). The dean's assertion that students make friends during orientation was at odds with the students' experiences. Few of the transfer students reported that they had remained in contact with any of the transfer students they had met at the orientation due to the short nature of this program. Instead,

the transfer students in this study seemed to make most of their friends through extracurricular activities at SU.

Another example of the deans' lack of understanding was evident in their comments regarding advising. Again, the idea of self-sufficiency was apparent. Dean O noted that "the advisor at SU sees his role as being a resource, and you come when you need to and you take advantage of me or not." This approach contrasts sharply with the LCC approach of guiding the students through each step of their academic career, as well as being aware of the students' personal problems that impact their academic endeavors. Dean A also takes a handoff approach to advising:

> We provide them [incoming transfer students] with [the names of] summer chairs so they can have someone to speak to on the telephone or in person if they come for a visit [during the summer]. But they are not required to do that, so many students simply select their classes by looking at the undergraduate record, the course offering directory and the transfer handbook, the advising sheet and equivalency statement so they know what courses they need to take. Theoretically, this information is sufficient for them, and most students do just fine. I usually check student's schedules about two weeks after they have access to telephone registration. There's usually two to three percent of students who sign up for clearly inappropriate classes like three graduate level courses or all history courses, or courses they don't have the prerequisites for. Then I send them a memo saying I think you made a mistake in selecting courses. So that helps prevent some of the more egregious problems.

However, this approach didn't work for Matt, who signed up for 19 credits, or Alice, who signed up for 18 credits, not realizing that this workload might be difficult to undertake in the midst of the adjustment process.

Dean A also noted that while second year transfer students were assigned a faculty advisor, rising third year transfer students are not "because we assume they will declare their major as part of their orientation in August and will have a major advisor at that point." However, in Christiana's experience, the importance of declaring a major and

selecting an advisor was not made clear to the transfer students. She did not realize that declaring a major required completing a certain amount of paperwork as well as selecting a faculty advisor. When it came time for her to register for spring classes in November, she had to scramble to fill out the paperwork and select an advisor so that she could get registered for the spring. While hers might be an isolated experience, Dean A might make a greater effort to verify that all third year transfer students have declared a major and selected a faculty advisor within the first few weeks of their first semester at SU.

The deans appeared to underestimate the students' academic adjustment as well as their difficulties with advising. Dean O noted that from quantitative studies done by the SU Office of Institutional Research, it was apparent that transfer students at SU perform as well academically as native students but feel less socially connected. While community college transfer students may do as well as their peers at SU, it should be noted that most enter SU with a very high GPA from the community college which almost always drops during their first semester at SU. Thus while they may still perform as well as the average student at SU, in their personal experience the drop in GPA can be quite devastating. For two years they have been at the top of their class, and now, perhaps, they are closer to the middle. This adjustment forms a significant portion of their transition process.

To a certain extent, the transition difficulties experienced by some transfer students resulted not from Dean A's lack of attention to transfer students but from lack of communication. Several transfer students reported having difficulty understanding the registration process and having to scramble to get registered once they realized that they had missed deadlines. Dean A, however, reported that during the fall semester his office

sends out a newsletter to all transfer students explaining the process of registration for spring classes. None of the students interviewed in this study mentioned such a newsletter. Whether they received this letter and misunderstood it, or whether they never received it is not known. Dean A also noted that his office runs a tutorial program for students having academic difficulties. Again, none of the students in the study mentioned such an program, and Beth, especially, noted the lack of sufficient tutorial help available at SU. Thus, while Dean A's office might offer useful services to transfer students, his office is not successful in communicating the availability of these services to transfer students.

Despite Dean A's misconceptions as to the difficulties involved in transfer, several of the students reported that they found Dean A to be helpful during their visits to his office. Alice, in particular, mentioned that he was helpful to her in dealing with some class conflicts. Sheila, who had an especially negative encounter with an admissions advisor at SU, found Dean A to be warm and caring:

> I had already talked to [an admissions advisor at SU] about transferring and he referred me to LCC and his attitude or tone was such that I felt put off. I was terribly discouraged. I left there thinking I was too old to do this. All of the things that kept me from doing this [coming to SU] in the first place. I thought I was too stupid to do this. Then LCC had Dean A come talk to us, and I had my first introduction to somebody who was in authority at SU who wasn't a creep. He was very approachable, very nice and wants us to come [to SU.] (Sheila)

Thus, perhaps any shortcomings on the part of Dean A in serving the needs of transfer students at SU result from a lack of understanding as to their plight as well as from a lack of communication with the students rather than from a lack of concern.

In conclusion, the deans' lack of understanding is best illustrated in the following comment by Dean A:

> You know, in the responses I get on the transfer student questionnaire, there's not that much difference in what I hear from native students. I think the problems are basically the same- scheduling, prioritizing, being active, seeking out instructors.

Based on the testimony of the students in this study, however, while community college transfer students do clearly encounter these same difficulties, they also have the additional difficulties of adjusting to the significant differences between the academic and social culture of the community college and that of their transfer institution.

Assertion 7:

Participants of the study offered several suggestions for ways the administration at SU could improve the transition process.

The students in this study had several suggestions for how administrators at SU could facilitate the transition process for students transferring to SU. Several students recommended scheduling orientation activities for transfer students throughout the fall semester rather than just during the first week of school. Most students envisioned these activities as discussion sections in which transfer students could get together and discuss problems they had encountered at SU. Not only would these sessions allow transfer students to achieve a sense of emotional release by verbalizing their concerns, fears, and disappointments, the sessions would also allow transfer students to pool their resources to help solve each other's problems. Some of the transfer students might have already encountered particular problems and arrived at solutions they could share with their fellow transfer students.

I think what would have really been nice is if after the one week transfer program is

> over, maybe once every two weeks we just get together and have a bitch *[whispered]* session. Because you can talk about problems you have, and things you've discovered that are new about the university you think are really cool. You can't discuss the transition process with people who have been at SU their entire undergraduate career. They don't really understand it, you can't discuss it with them. (Darby)

One student noted sheepishly that these sessions would serve as support groups for community college transfer students, apologizing for what she thought of as a "corny" term. This student even went so far as to suggest that the sessions be restricted to community college transfer students since, as she saw it, their problems were different from those experienced by students who transfer to SU from another four-year institution. Although not suggested by any of the students, these groups might be most successful if they were led by a transfer student who had been at SU for at least a year. Perhaps a few of the Transfer Student Peer Advisors could continue their work with the orientation program by facilitating these sessions.

Another participant in the study suggested that SU provide increased academic support to transfer students in particular, but also to the entire student body as well. She felt that students who encounter academic difficulties at SU were not provided with adequate academic support in the form of tutoring. As she struggled to adjust to the increased rigors of the courses at SU, she was frustrated by the limited office hours provided by faculty and the lack of tutoring available to students.

> Academically there needs to be more support. There needs to be a place we can go as far as help tutoring. I found myself struggling my first semester and I didn't get any help. (Beth)

Interestingly, Dean A mentioned during his interview that the College of Arts and Sciences does run a tutoring program. It is coordinated by one of Dean A's staff

members who calls each department to find graduate students who are available for tutoring. She then directs the undergraduate students seeking help to those graduate students in the appropriate department. However, none of the students in this study mentioned such a program, and thus SU's efforts to provide academic support to students are seemingly not well publicized to transfer students.

Two other students recommended that Dean A and his staff do a "progress check" with each transfer student individually about a month or so into the fall semester. This progress check would allow Dean A to assess the status of both the student's academic and social transition to SU. Any students who were encountering specific academic difficulties could be counseled to take advantage of the College's tutorial services. Students experiencing more logistical difficulties or difficulties making social connections could be directed to one of the discussion sessions mentioned above. Although these progress checks would be a time consuming endeavor for Dean A and his staff, making a commitment to monitor the progress of transfer students would greatly enhance retention of transfer students, as well as the quality of each transfer student's educational experience at SU.

Finally, while the participants of this study did offer the specific suggestions for improving the transfer process discussed above, several students also noted that there was only so much the SU administration could do to make the transition from LCC to SU easier. Any transition, they remarked, is going to be difficult, and transfer students cannot be protected from all the difficulties inherent in transferring to a new institution.

> I think [transfer is] one of life's situations where you are going to have experience it. Administrators can't shield you from everything, and it's one of those sink or swim experiences. (Brandy)

> Transferring is going to be difficult, it's going to be hard, but you're just going to have to deal with it. Going from one place to another, there's no way to make it not hard. (Kate)

Thus, the participants in this study, while identifying specific improvements that the SU administration could institute to facilitate their transition to SU, also recognized their own role in the process. They acknowledged that they must take the initiative to seek out their professors during office hours, to partake of academic support opportunities provided by the transfer institution, and to actively pursue academic and social connections both in and out of class in order to adjust both academically and socially to the transfer institution.

Assertion 8 (Key Assertion)

As mentioned previously, an important task of the qualitative researcher is to examine the assertions that were drawn from the data and from them derive a key assertion that links all of the assertions and makes a concluding statement about the research as a whole. A significant pattern that emerged from the data collected in the twelve student interviews was the importance of finding a niche. From the seven assertions discussed above, the following eighth and key assertion was drawn:

> **Satisfaction with one's university life requires finding or creating a niche for oneself. A positive transition required finding a niche at the transfer institution in which to make and build relationships.**

In this study, the term "positive" in relation to a student's transfer experience will be defined as the student's overall satisfaction with his/her transfer experience as reported during the student interviews.

The term "niche" in the same assertion, needs a more expansive explanation. In this study, the term niche will be limited to the student's university life and defined as a role in university life from which a person derives a sense of purpose and self-esteem. A niche in this sense generally includes both an academic component and a social component; the student must achieve academic success as defined by each participant's own standards, as well as develop social connections with others. A niche provides a sense of security and meaning to a person's life. Upon transferring a new institution, transfer students are forced to cut ties with an old, familiar culture (the community college) and forge ties within their new environment (the transfer institution), a process that can be disorientating and leave the students feeling lost and adrift. By finding a niche within the transfer institution, however, the student is able to anchor him or herself to some component of the new environment, and thus achieve both a sense of security and a sense of purpose. Finding a niche at the transfer institution, thus, allows the students to re-establish their previous sense of control over their lives, as well as affirm their sense of significance in the world.

While a niche can be divided into academic and social components, it should be recognized that these components cannot be completely separated. The two overlap in numerous ways, for example when students discuss academic material outside of class or study together in the library, as well as in the social dynamics that exist within the

classroom. In the context of this study, however, the academic and social components were considered separately.

The students in this study could be divided into two groups as far as niche formation was concerned. Some transfer students in this study sought to establish both the academic and social components of their niche within the SU environment. These students, thus, needed to achieve success as a student at SU, as well as forge social connections with other students at SU. Other students in this study, however, had already established the social component of their niche outside the SU environment prior to transfer. Thus, while these students needed to achieve academic success as a student to fulfill the academic portion of the niche definition, they relied on their family and friends outside SU for their social connections. The experiences of the students in the first group were much different from those of the students in the second group, as they were trying assimilate into both the academic and social cultures at SU, while the students in the second group, who found their social fulfillment outside SU, were interested in assimilating into the academic culture at SU but were not necessarily interested in forging significant social connections with students at SU. Thus, while all of the transfer students needed to adjust to the academic culture at SU, only some of them also sought to establish significant social connections at SU.

Creating an academic niche at SU, a process that all of the transfer students had to go through, entailed adjusting to the differences in pedagogy and institutional size between LCC and SU as discussed in previous assertions. This process serves as a common denominator among the twelve participants. It was in the process of establishing a social niche at SU that the differences in satisfaction with the transfer

process were starkly delineated among the students. Those who did not desire such a niche within SU were spared the difficulties associated with breaking into SU's tight-knit social culture. The experiences of those who did wish such a social niche at SU varied based on the efforts they made to establish social connections and also on their immediate social situations upon transferring to SU.

Darby and Matt provide excellent examples of students who sought to establish both the academic and social components of their niche at SU. Both were lonely and unhappy at SU until they established the social component of their niche. Darby found her social niche through her work at the Women's Center while Matt found his through the religious group he joined.

> Before I joined [religious group] I felt alone. I didn't know anyone. I went to class and went home. (Matt)

> I started volunteering a the Women's Center because I've always been interested in feminist issues but also just to talk to people. And I'm really glad I did that because you get to meet people and meet the administration. (Darby)

Both of these groups gave Darby and Matt a sense of purpose and belonging at SU, and also afforded them the opportunity to make friends. Jared, too, was dissatisfied at SU until he found a group of friends among Collegetown's music scene, a group that included both townspeople and students from SU.

Of the twelve students interviewed, Kate and Julie had the smoothest transitions as a result of being able to quickly establish a social niche for themselves at SU. Kate made several friends by virtue of living in a dorm where other transfer students lived, and Julie made numerous friends through her association with the SU track team.

> I had people on the [track] team help. The team made a conscious effort to introduce me to a lot of people because they knew I wasn't getting the whole [first-year]

> experience. If I came here as a regular transfer it would have been a lot harder. (Julie)

While Darby, Matt, and Jared eventually established a social niche for themselves, their transition was difficult until they had managed to do so. Kate and Julie, however, benefited from having a "built-in" social niche.

Finally, Alice was a student who sought to establish a social niche at SU but had not managed to do so at the time of her interview. During her interview, she admitted that she wished she had more social interaction with other students at SU. However, being an introverted woman, she was not sure how to go about establishing such contacts.

> Well, you have to consider my personality. I'm not much of an initiator of meeting people. I'm rather reserved and keep to myself. It takes me a while to make friends. I stick close to home. (Alice)

As a result, Alice typically retreated to the security of her family on the weekends, further isolating herself from the social scene at SU.

For those students hoping to establish the social component of their university niche through social activities or organizations at SU, time was often a confounding factor, usually due to both the increased rigor of course work at SU compared to LCC and to the students' need to work off campus. Sarah noted in frustration that she would have liked to join more organizations at SU in order to establish more social contacts, but between the increased amount of studying required of her at SU and having to work to cover her expenses, she was unable to do so. She was envious of the students at SU who were supported by their parents, and thus could use the time she spent working socializing.

> I work 25 hours a week while other students are spending that time just studying. So while they are socializing I am spending that time studying. If I had time I'd get

involved in activities a little more. (Sarah)

While clearly all native students at SU are not supported by their parents and free from the pressures of paying their expenses, many SU students are in this category and thus are able to devote more time and effort to establishing social connections at SU.

While the students mentioned above established a social niche at SU through participating in activities or organizations at SU, some students in the study were not interested in finding a niche at SU. These students had already established a social niche for themselves outside the university, and thus did not need to search for one at SU. Typically the students in this category were older students who had spouses and children who were not affiliated with SU. Brandy, Dennis, and Sheila noted that their social lives revolved around their families. They came to SU for academic purposes, and though they would occasionally study outside of class with other SU students, all of their social activities involved friends from outside their SU experience, usually other married people with children.

> I could do some things with the [SU] students if I wanted to but I guess I'm too old. I get tired too early. Plus I'm not interested in going out and partying all night. That cuts into their [the younger students'] time too much. My house needs to be cleaned and my laundry needs to be done. I need to spend time with my husband and the children. (Brandy)

Beth, a single mother, strongly regretted not having more time to become socially involved at SU. She noted that she in no way felt connected to her peers at SU. However, she felt she had a more pressing obligation to her son, and thus her free time was spent attending his soccer games and PTA meetings.

> I feel like I need to devote more time to my studies than to social gatherings. The non-traditional age students have gatherings that I very much intended on attending but I have not. I have a child. What I want to do [socially] takes a backseat to what

goes on in his life. (Beth)

Finally, Christiana, though not married, had already established a group of friends in the Collegetown community before transferring to SU. Her friends consisted primarily of Collegetown professionals whom she met through her various jobs in Collegetown and graduate students at SU whom she met through her roommate, an SU graduate student.

> The community has a pool of professional people who are around my age group and there's enough activities to offer a rich social life. I have a good circle of friends here in Collegetown that I spend time with. The more people you meet the more people they introduce you to. Also, a lot of my friends are graduate students [that she met through her roommate]. (Christiana)

Thus, upon transfer to SU she did not feel the need to form friendships with the undergraduate students in her classes.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that the transfer students in this study who sought to find a social niche for themselves at SU were generally single and in their young twenties, while those who already had a social niche for themselves outside SU were generally older and had families of their own. Thus, niche formation for the older students in this study involved primarily adjustment to the academic culture of SU, and they were, therefore, spared some of the difficulties the younger students encountered relative to social integration. For the older students who weren't seeking social connections at SU, the difficulties inherent in integrating into previously formed social circles were of little relevance.

However, while the students in this study who were most interested in social integration were the younger students, it cannot be concluded that the degree of interest in social integration is necessarily an age related phenomenon. Instead, it is likely that the

degree of interest in social integration depends on the strength of the social network a student has outside the transfer institution, rather than the student's age. In this study, the students who had a strong social network before arriving at SU happened to be older students who had a spouse and children. However, Christiana provides an example of an older student who, though not married with children, had a strong circle of friends in Collegetown prior to enrolling at SU, and thus was not particularly interested in developing friendships with the native students at SU. Thus, while more research needs to be done, it is possible that a transfer student's interest in social integration into the transfer institution's social culture is dependent primarily on the social network that the student has outside the institution.

The concept of niche formation is supported not only by the data from the student interviews but also by the SACQ results (see Appendix D). For example, Darby's scores on the SACQ reflect her assertion that she felt academically adjusted to SU but was still dissatisfied with her social integration. Her score on the academic subscale was above the mean, but her scores on the social adjustment, personal adjustment, and attachment subscales, as well as her score on the Full Scale were all well below the mean. Julie, on the other hand, who reported struggling academically, but having made strong social connections through her teammates scored below the mean on her academic adjustment subscale but above the mean on her social adjustment subscale. Sheila reported in her interview that she felt well adjusted to SU academically but that, as an older student, she was not seeking to form serious friendships with the younger students at SU. Sheila's academic adjustment subscale score was almost two standard deviations above the mean, while her score on the social adjustment subscale was considerably lower than her score

on the academic adjustment subscale. This subscale includes such questions as: "I have several close social ties at this college" and "I haven't been mixing too well with the opposite sex lately". Since the focus of Sheila's social life is her husband and children, these questions certainly would not apply. Thus, the results of the SACQ serve as confirmatory evidence that give credibility to the concept of the academic and social components of the niche, as well as to the importance of niche formation.

The key assertion for this study, in addition to drawing a unifying conclusion from the seven previous assertions, also serves to answer the question raised by the two vignettes that opened this chapter. The experiences of the transfer students portrayed in the two vignettes differed so greatly, and yet both vignettes were based on the experiences of students who transferred from the same community college to the same four-year institution. How could their experiences have been so different? The answer to this question lies in each student's interest in and ability to create a niche for themselves at SU. As full-time students at SU, the academic component of their niche came from academic success at SU (success being defined by each student's personal standards). The social component of the niche for some transfer students was fulfilled primarily by friends and family outside of SU, while for other transfer students making social connections at SU was an important part of creating a niche for themselves. For those students who were satisfied with their social interactions outside SU, the transition consisted primarily of adjusting to the difference in pedagogy and increased rigor of the courses at SU. For students who sought to create social connections for themselves at SU, the transition to SU included both the academic adjustment to SU, as well as establishment of a social network for themselves at SU. Because integrating into the

social culture at SU was difficult for transfer students, niche formation at SU was a much harder task for students in this second group of transfer students. As mentioned above, the students who either had ready-made connections at SU, such as Julie with the track team, or students who were able to incorporate themselves into a group at SU, such as Matt, had the smoothest transitions. The students who lacked the time to form strong connections with an SU group, such as Sarah, or who were introverted, such as Alice, had a much more difficult transition to SU.

What, then, are the implications of the "niche hypothesis"? The implications of this hypothesis for both transfer students and administrators at the transfer institution will be discussed in Chapter Five. That chapter will also include a discussion of how the findings of this study relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, and how this study contributes to the literature on community college transfer students. Finally, Chapter Five will close with a consideration of future research questions that remain to be studied in light of the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This study sought to understand the transition experience of students who transferred from a community college to a four-year institution. In particular, the researcher presented a detailed depiction of the experience of transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. The major research question at the outset of the study was: What is the transfer experience like? The working hypothesis for this study was that due to differences in culture between community colleges and four-year institutions, some transfer students experience transition difficulties upon transfer to a four-year institution. Because qualitative research involves emergent design, more specific research questions could not be set forth at the outset of the study. However, during the course of the study, the researcher collected data that supported the hypothesis and that, for this study's population, answered the following subquestions:

- Do community college transfer students perceive differences in culture between the community college and the four-year institution?
- If so, did these differences cause any transition difficulties for the students?
- How can four-year institutions improve the transfer process for community college transfer students?

As predicted, the study group consisted of students whose transfer experiences ranged from relatively smooth to relatively difficult. However, the experiences of all of the participants provided insight into the obstacles that some community college students face in transfer and how those obstacles can be avoided or overcome. Students who experienced transfer difficulties were able to identify specific aspects of the transfer experience that served as barriers to their transition process. The experiences of students who transitioned easily, on the other hand, provided insights into what factors increased the likelihood of a smooth transition.

In Chapter Four, the findings of this study were presented and the importance was proposed of finding a niche at the transfer institution and/or among family and friends outside the institution in order for students to successfully transition to the transfer institution. A successful transition, as mentioned previously, was defined differently by each student, but generally involved completing the required coursework to graduate from the transfer institution, and, for some students, establishing a group of friends at the transfer institution. In Chapter Five, the findings of this study will be considered in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, examining whether these findings corroborate the literature reviewed. Additionally, the model posited in Chapter Three to explain the transition process will be re-examined in light of the findings of this study. Then, the contributions the findings of this study make to the literature will be considered. Next, the implications of the niche hypothesis for both administrators at the transfer institution, as well as for the transfer students themselves will be explored. Finally, questions that remain unanswered, as well as those raised by the findings of this study, will be suggested in this chapter as avenues of future research.

Relationship of the Findings to the Literature

The findings of this study tended to corroborate the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Diaz's 1992 meta-analysis of quantitative transfer studies indicated that transfer shock, a drop in GPA upon transfer to a four-year institution, did generally occur among community college transfer students, but the students subsequently recovered some or all of the lost GPA, a finding that indicates a period of transition followed by at least academic, if not social, adjustment to the transfer institution. This assertion on the part of Diaz was verified by the experiences of the students interviewed in this study. Every student in the study experienced a drop in GPA in their first semester at SU. However, at the time of the interview (halfway through their second semester at SU), most students reported that they felt confident that the grades they would receive that semester would be closer to what they were used to earning at LCC. They reported that although the first semester had been a shock for them academically because of the increased rigor of the courses at SU compared to LCC, they had since become accustomed to the increased academic expectations at SU and were confident in their abilities to succeed. It would be interesting to compare their final GPA at SU to the GPAs they earned at LCC to see if they did indeed recover some or all of the lost GPA as Diaz found with the students in her study.

The findings of this study also corroborate the findings of the two qualitative studies reviewed in Chapter Two. Williams (1973) found that the students with the most successful transfer experiences were those who were independent and self-reliant. According to Williams, the special attention paid to students at community colleges by

counselors and faculty conditioned the students to rely on faculty and administrators. Upon transfer to a large, four-year institution, the less self-reliant students were not able to accomplish administrative tasks, through which they had been guided at the community college by counselors (advising, registration), or the academic tasks, through which they had been guided by faculty at the community college, required of them at the four-year institution. The students in the current study, too, reported that they were required to accomplish many more tasks on their own, both in terms of registration and selecting a curriculum of courses, as well as in terms of understanding course content. The students in Townsend's 1993 study (a, b) also reported that they received much less specialized attention from faculty. Additionally, they reported, as did the students in this study, that due to a strong sense of competition amongst the students at the transfer institution (which had been absent at the community college), the native students were reluctant to provide help or study with the transfer students.

Based on findings in the literature, this study assumed a difference in culture between community colleges and four-year institutions as described by Cohen and Brawer (1996) and Laanan (1996). These authors argued that the two cultures differ most significantly in student population, in the special attention received by students from counselors and faculty at community colleges, and in the faculty's approach to teaching. All three of their assertions were confirmed by this study. These authors noted that community college students are generally older than the traditional college age and generally come from a lower socioeconomic background. The students in this study fell into either a group of older students (late 20s, early 30s) who generally had families of their own, or students who, though younger than the first group, were older generally

than their peers at SU by a few years. In addition, most of the students in this study came from families where going to college was not assumed, and therefore they were required to pay their own way through college whereas many of their SU peers were supported financially by their parents. Cohen and Brawer also noted the special attention received by community college students, especially from their instructors. Most of the students in this study noted a sharp contrast between faculty at SU and those at LCC. At LCC, their faculty had been informal and focused on helping the students succeed academically both during and outside of class. At SU, while the faculty certainly cared about the academic success of their students, they were unable to devote as much attention to their students due to the large size of their classes and because teaching was only one component of their job, rather than the focus of their job as it is for community college faculty. Thus, this study confirms many of the assertions in the literature regarding the differences between the cultures of community colleges and four-year institutions.

As stated in Chapter 3, this study also endeavored to examine a model of the transition process that was based on a compilation of Tinto's theory of individual departure (1987) and Astin's I-E-O model (1993). However, because the majority of this study focused on the experience of transfer rather than the outcome of transfer, the researcher was most concerned with the congruence, as reported by the participants, between the two sets of environmental variables posited by the tentative model, differences in institutional culture experienced by the transfer students and types of institutional support available to the transfer students. The model proposed the importance of the interaction between these two sets of environmental variables in contributing to the outcome of a favorable transition as defined by the model. The

opinions of the twelve students in the study regarding most of the environmental variables associated with institutional culture (pedagogical methods, faculty accessibility, classroom atmosphere, academic advising, level of computer proficiency required, peer groups, co-curricular activities) have already been discussed in comparing the difference between the cultures of a community college and a four-year institution. One important exception is the variable regarding computer proficiency. In responding to questions about difficulties that might have ensued due to the increased use of computers at SU as compared to LCC, the students reported little or no difficulty in setting up an e-mail account and learning to incorporate computers into their academic endeavors. Thus, while the researcher predicted that community college students would struggle to become proficient in the use of computers, this proved not to be the case.

One finding that had not occurred to the researcher in predicting important variables related to institutional culture was the sense of urgency felt by many of the transfer students to assimilate quickly into the SU culture. Several mentioned feeling pressure to become as familiar and comfortable with both the academic and social cultures at SU as their native peers. Feeling behind, transfer students tried to accomplish in a few weeks or months what their native peers had had two years to do: make a place for themselves at SU and become familiar with the institutional mores.

The variables listed under the category of institutional support (orientation programs, academic advising, academic support services, counseling, on-campus housing), have also been discussed previously. What needs to be considered here is how the two sets of variables interact to affect the transition process. Many students had difficulty adjusting to the differences in institutional culture between the community

college and the four-year institution such as decreased faculty accessibility, the formal, non-interactive classroom atmosphere of large classes, and the difficulty in establishing a peer group. The quality of the services provided by the administration did serve to be an obstacle to students trying to cope with these differences in culture. While the administration at SU did have a strong orientation program for transfer students upon their arrival to SU, several students suggested, as discussed in Chapter Four, that the administration should increase the duration of the orientation program, better publicize the tutoring programs available at SU, and arrange mid-semester check-up appointments with a counselor for transfer students. Thus, this study did confirm the importance of providing institutional support programs (the second set of environmental variables) to ease the difficulties students might encounter with differences in institutional culture between their community college and their transfer institution (the first set of environmental variables). In short, a strong interaction between the two sets of environmental variables is important to facilitate the transition process.

Contributions of this Study to the Literature

This study, then, provided insights into the experiences of students who transfer from a suburban community college to a residential four-year institution. While transfer experiences naturally varied from student to student, the overriding theme of the importance of niche-making was clearly evident and serves as an important concept in preparing community college students for the transition that occurs upon transfer to a four-year institution. The theory of the niche formation arose from data collected to

answer the three subquestions posed at the outset of the study and earlier in this chapter (page 132).

The niche hypothesis is based upon the concept that some students do face difficulties in adjusting to the transfer institution and that by following the precepts of this theory both the students and the administration of the four-year institution can devise ways in which to improve this process.

While data from qualitative studies are not usually generalizable to large populations because of the small sample sizes involved, the data from this study can be useful in studying the transfer process of students from and to institutions similar to those in this study, and also serve as a starting point for studying the experiences of students transferring from and to institutions that are significantly different from the institutions in this study.

This study also helps to fill a void that currently exists in the literature as far as qualitative studies that examine the transition process that community college transfer students experience upon transfer to a four-year institution. As mentioned previously, the majority of the studies on transfer students are quantitative in nature, usually examining outcomes of transfer such as final GPAs or graduation rates of transfer students as compared to native students. Qualitative studies, by contrast, allow researchers to examine the transition process as students adjust to the transfer institution rather than examining the outcome of the transfer experience by examining GPAs or graduation rates. The quantitative studies mentioned above do provide important information related to the outcome of transfer; this information can help community college administrators determine if their colleges are adequately preparing students to achieve academically at

transfer institutions. These studies do not, however, help the transfer institutions understand how to improve the transition process for transfer students. This transition process is crucial because without a successful transition, the transfer students are unlikely to graduate from the transfer institution which is, presumably, the goal for these students. In general, quantitative studies that measure outcomes provide insufficient information to administrators at the transfer institution trying to understand the transition process because graduation rates do not indicate the quality of a student's experience at the institution. For example, a student may fare well academically at a transfer institution but withdraw due to difficulties adjusting to the social culture of that institution, or the student may graduate but have had a miserable experience at the transfer institution due to poor niche-formation. Qualitative studies such as this one, by contrast, allow administrators interested in improving the transition process understand what obstacles students face in order to develop ways to improve the transition process.

Although other authors, it should be noted, have used quantitative methods to study academic and social integration, no such studies have been undertaken with community college transfer students. However, these quantitative methodologies could be useful in future studies on this topic. Having collected data from community college transfer students as to the important factors impacting their transition experiences, a quantitative instrument could now be designed using those identified factors to assess a large number of community college students at SU as well as at other transfer institutions. One question that might be addressed by such as instrument is whether the factors impacting transition to the transfer institution vary according to Carnegie classifications of four-year institutions.

Implications of the Niche Hypothesis

In seeking ways to improve the transition process for transfer students, administrators should first be aware of and understand the process of niche formation that these students are experiencing. Administrators need to recognize that all transfer students initially struggle to carve out an academic niche for themselves and many transfer students are also seeking a social niche at SU. Transfer students need support and guidance from administrators at the transfer institution during this difficult period. At present, administrators at SU, while seemingly sincere in their efforts to help transfer students, underestimate the difficulty of the transfer process. Thus, before specific changes can be instituted to improve the transfer process, the first step that must be taken is educating the administrators of transfer institutions about the importance of niche formation during the transition process. If administrators are not aware of the process transfer students experience in transitioning to their transfer institution then they will not understand the importance of the suggestions put forth by both the students in this study and by the researcher.

In addition to becoming educated themselves as to the importance of niche formation, administrators also need to educate the transfer students about this concept during the orientation program. Currently administrators do encourage students at the orientation program to become involved in clubs and organizations on campus, but they should also articulate the concept of niche formation in order to emphasize the importance of becoming socially involved at the transfer institution.

In addition to educating themselves and transfer students as to the importance of niche formation, several specific recommendations could also be enacted to improve the transfer process. As discussed in Chapter Four, the student participants of this study made several suggestions for how the SU administration could improve the transfer process: periodic discussion sessions as an extension of orientation, increased academic support, and progress checks for transfer students. In reference to orientation, the researcher believes that sessions should be designed that specifically address academic integration and others that specifically address social integration. Students who were not interested in social integration could attend the former but not the latter. As suggested by the transfer students, these sessions should occur throughout the first semester after transfer, rather than just in the first week of the semester. The researcher also believes that transfer students would greatly benefit from the establishment of a center similar to the First Year Resource Center at SU. This center offers first year students a way of becoming oriented to the university by referring students to the proper offices around the university as needed and by offering emotional support during the difficult transition period. In addition, the Center provides a place for students to meet with tutors. A Transfer Resource Center would serve as a meeting place where transfer students could meet with others who might be having experiences similar to their own. Staffed by students who had themselves transferred to SU, the Center would provide moral and emotional support to transfer students, and also serve as a symbol that the administration recognizes the potential difficulties inherent in transfer.

Additionally, the researcher encourages the administration at SU to create a transfer floor or building in one of the dormitory complexes on campus, similar to the

Transfer Dorm at Florida State University mentioned in Chapter Two. Living in a dorm with several other transfer students proved beneficial to Kate; she was able to quickly make a group of friends at SU. The living spaces for transfer students should consist of a suite of single rooms with a common kitchen and living room. Because most community college transfer students are older than the traditional college age, even if only by a few years, most of these students would probably not be interested in the traditional dorm set-up of rooms on a hall or in sharing a room with a stranger. Of course, there are community college transfer students who are of traditional college age, and for these students the traditional dorm set-up might be appealing. By establishing a transfer floor or building in a larger dormitory complex, the administration would allow transfer students to easily meet other transfer students, as well as native students at the university.

In addition to having former transfer students act as Transfer Student Peer Advisors, the administration at the transfer institution should also encourage native students to play a role in welcoming transfer students to the university community. One way that native students could become involved is through a mentoring program in which a transfer student is paired with a native student. Having completed niche formation during his or her first year, this native student would presumably be familiar with the academic workings of the insitution and also have a circle of friends that the transfer student could meet. Such a program would not only benefit the transfer students, but also raise awareness among the native students that some students enter the institution as second or third year students and lack the first year experience from which they themselves benefited. Thus, by recognizing the needs of transfer students, administrators

can take steps that will make the transition smoother and that will make the students feel a welcome part of their transfer institution.

Finally, although the administration at the transfer institution should take the steps outlined above to improve the transition process, both the community college attended by the transfer students as well as the transfer students themselves should also take an active role in the transition process. Community colleges certainly have a responsibility to prepare their students for transfer to a four-year institution. The efforts of community colleges to help their students succeed at transfer institutions, however, was not the focus of this study. The transfer students also bear some of the responsibility in the transition process. As mentioned previously, several students in the study recognized this fact, noting that there was only so much the SU administration could do to make the transition from LCC to SU easier. Any transition, they argued, is going to be difficult, and transfer students cannot be protected from all the difficulties inherent in transferring to a new institution. While administrators at SU have much progress to make in facilitating the transition experiences of transfer students, they cannot be expected to remove all the obstacles that a transfer student might encounter. To a certain extent, transferring to a new institution is one of those experiences in life, though difficult and unpleasant at times, from which much learning and maturing ensues.

This study is only the first of many that need to be undertaken to understand fully the transition process that transfer students experience. Questions that still need to be explored and understood will be discussed next.

Future Research

The findings of this study raised many interesting questions that would serve as topics for further research. First, the findings of this study apply primarily to students transferring from a suburban community college to a residential four-year institution. How might the findings of this study be different if the transfer institution was an urban university with a predominantly commuter population? Would students experience the same transition difficulties as those experienced by the students in this study? What difficulties would be different? The researcher hypothesizes that, while these community college transfer students might encounter similar academic difficulties (such as increased rigor of course content and decreased faculty interaction), they would encounter many fewer difficulties in adjusting to the social culture of the institution. While it should not be overlooked that both community colleges and urban, commuter colleges and universities have students who are of traditional college age and attend full-time, both of these types of institutions tend to have a significant number of students older than traditional college age who attend part-time and who often have full-time jobs and families outside the sphere of the institution. These urban college students come to campus to attend classes and then leave campus to attend to the other aspects of their lives, much as many community college students do. Thus, while community college students who transfer to urban colleges and universities might need to adjust to differences between the academic cultures of the community college and their transfer institution, they might not be as likely to encounter great differences in the social cultures

of these two institutions. The tight-knit social interactions that transfer students in this study experienced at SU would likely be much reduced at an urban university.

A study designed to examine this hypothesis might entail interviewing students from the same community college as the one in this study but who transferred to an urban, commuter institution rather than to a residential institution. One important variable that would differ between the current and the proposed study would be the fact that the students transferring to an urban institution would be leaving the small town of Collegetown to move to a large city. Students in the proposed study would have to adjust to a new town as well as a new institution. Several of the students in this study mentioned that they believed that being familiar with Collegetown made their transition to SU easier. Another possible variation of the proposed study would be to interview students who transferred from the community college in the same town as the urban university. These students would not have to adjust to a new town, but their community college experience might have been greatly different from that of the students in this study. Thus, either study would have a variable that was significantly different from the design of the current study that would have to be considered in comparing the findings of the proposed studies to those of the current study.

Another study that would serve to expound upon the findings of this study stems from a communication the researcher received from a participant in this study some time after the interviews were conducted. As noted previously, the interviews for this study were conducted in the spring of 1998. In September 1998, the researcher sent copies of the interview transcripts to each participant for member-checking. After reading the transcript of her interview, Kate sent the researcher an electronic mail message in which

she stated that, while the answers she had given during her interview were truthful answers in her mind at the time, she had since come to realize that her transfer experience was not as smooth as she had stated in her interview. In her interview, Kate mentioned some minor problems she had had, but overall felt that her transition had been smooth, in large part, because she lived on campus and had met other students through her living situation. However, in Kate's later message, she stated that she had been fooling herself into believing that she was happy and adjusted to SU. Kate noted that:

> I was relying on my roommate and my boyfriend, and I was not really as happy [at SU] as I should have been. Because I would go home every weekend to see my boyfriend (who, I think, served as a stabilizing factor for me--even though I was in a new school, in a new town, with new people and new situations, I still had him--and he represented something that wasn't new and different). I did not get involved in anything and did not meet new people. Even though I told myself that it was fine, that it was not a requirement for me to get involved or make an effort to meet people, I slowly discovered how unhappy I really was, and how that unhappiness was stemming from the fact that I didn't know anyone and didn't do anything. Even though I said I was happy and adjusted, I was lying to myself--and perhaps unknowingly skewed your study.

Thus, after the passage of six months, Kate's view of her transfer experience was completely different from her view of that experience six months earlier. Based on this finding, the researcher proposes that conducting a follow-up to this study with the same students just prior to their graduation from SU would serve as interesting means of assessing how the students' feelings toward their transfer experiences changed as time passes. The researcher originally selected the second semester after transfer as the time to interview the students because they would by this time have had time to adjust to their new institution, but the initial transfer experiences would still be fresh in their minds. The researcher hypothesized that by waiting to interview transfer students after two years at the transfer institution, the students would have forgotten some of their more painful

experiences and downplayed the difficulties they might have encountered during their transition process. However, perhaps more of the students would have responded as did Kate- that they believed at first that they were happy at the transfer institution but then realized that they were not in fact well-adjusted to their new institution.

Kate's story, however, ends on a happy note:

> During the last part of the spring semester and over the summer, I did a lot of thinking and reevaluating and growing up. And during that time, I made a lot of decisions. I broke up with [my boyfriend], because I realized that I was only holding on to him as a means to hold on to what was familiar--and that was not fair to either of us. I have changed a lot from the person I was last year, and now I truly am happy here at [SU], and love it more than ever. Coming from a county where I grew up with everyone I knew, I never really had to deal with social situations where I actually had to meet and deal with people who were strangers. I didn't know how to force myself to interact with groups or clubs. I really had to learn, and during the past month that I've been at school this semester, I have met more people than I ever have in my entire life--I am involved in a few (not many, but enough) things, ([volunteering] and a religious organization), and I made the effort to really distance myself from the leadership of my roommate and find my own friends.

Thus, while Kate believed she was happy, it took her until the end of her first year to realize that she was not, and then an additional period of reflection over the summer to understand why she was not happy at her new institution and how to go about improving her situation at SU. As a final note, Kate's decisions upon returning to SU for her second year continue to support the key assertion of this study regarding the importance of finding or making a niche for oneself at the transfer institution. Once Kate became involved in organizations and made an effort to meet more people she felt like she had made a place for herself at SU, and was much happier there as a student.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes significantly to a literature nearly devoid of qualitative studies examining the transition process experienced by community college transfer students. By understanding the importance of niche formation in achieving a satisfying transfer experience, administrators at four-year institutions can help transfer students integrate into the culture of the transfer institution. While transfer students themselves must take the initiative to become involved in campus activities, administrators can encourage this process by articulating the importance of niche formation to new transfer students and by facilitating this niche formation through extended orientation activities, mid-semester progress checks, and perhaps even a Transfer Resource Center or Transfer Dorm. While these programs require a commitment of resources on the part of the transfer institution, the testimony of the students in this study reveals that the needs of transfer students are not being met by the programs currently in place, at least at the transfer institution in this study. When an institution accepts transfer students, it should also accept the responsibility to facilitate their transition to the institution. While many community college transfer students succeed in spite of the obstacles they face during the transition process, clearly the better option would be to ease this process by instituting some of the recommendations discussed earlier.

The lack of adequate attention paid to the needs of community college transfer students raises the question of why four-year institutions accept transfer students at all. There are likely several reasons for accepting community college transfer students,

including replacing native students who have left the institution, building diversity into the student body, and benefiting from the special talents of certain students. While many private institutions seek out community college transfer students to bolster declining enrollments, declining enrollment is generally not a problem at most public four-year institutions. Public four-year institutions throughout the country, however, are experiencing pressure from their state legislative assemblies to accept community college transfer students. Community colleges are generally viewed favorably by legislators because they offer a cost-effective means of educating students. However, because students with baccalaureate degree aspirations will only attend community colleges if they feel confident that four-year institutions in the state are willing to accept community college transfer students, legislators pressure four-year institutions to accept community college transfer students on a regular basis. In addition, legislators from each jurisdiction in which a four-year institution is located are pressured by their constituents in that jurisdiction to see that their educational needs are met. Four-year institutions, thus, accept community college students as a response to the pressures of legislators who view community colleges as a cost effective way to educate their constituents and who are themselves pressured by constituents who need their educational needs met by transferring from their local community college to a nearby four-year institution.

Currently, however, once the community college transfer students arrive at the transfer institution, they are not adequately helped to assimilate into the institution's culture. If public colleges and universities choose to conciliate their legislators by accepting transfer students into their institution, they have a duty to help those students succeed at their institution. Without this commitment, community college transfer

students simply serve as pawns in a political game. Thus, administrators need to assume an active role in helping transfer students integrate into the culture of the transfer institution, and qualitative studies can help administrators understand how to fulfill this role.

The lack of attention paid to community college transfer students also illustrates the lack of articulation between the three major components of the educational system in the United States: K-12 schools, community colleges, and baccalaureate degree granting institutions. Currently the onus of the transition from one component to the next is on the student. Because each component is so different and because they do not work together to form a seamless educational system, students arriving at one from another must adjust to the different academic and social systems in place in each one. But as stated earlier in this chapter, the responsibility for the transition should be shared by the institutions as well as by the students. If the articulation between these three components of the educational system were improved, the amount of adjustment that students would have to undergo as they moved from one to another would be decreased. Currently, because students lack substantial institutional support after transfer, the students who succeed in progressing from one component of the educational system to the next are those whose academic, social, and cultural skills are the most developed. Therefore, minority students and students from lower socioeconomic classes tend to fare less well in progressing from one component to the next. However, if articulation between the components of the American educational system were increased and the educational institutions played an active role in helping students with the transition process, then all students would have a fair chance of succeeding within that system.

While this study is an important contribution to the understanding of the transition process, it is only the first of many qualitative studies that need to be undertaken to fully understand the transition process that community college transfer students experience. As educators, it is incumbent upon administrators at four-year institutions to help transfer students adjust quickly to their new institution so that they can take advantage of the myriad of opportunities that four-year institutions afford their students, as well as achieve their educational goals in the most satisfying and fulfilling way. It is the hope of this researcher that this study will serve as a small but important contribution to the understanding of the transition process community college transfer students experience so as to help administrators at four-year institutions be responsive to and serve the needs of transfer students in a knowledgeable, sensitive, and supportive manner.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

I am studying the transition process students experience in transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. I'd like to start with some background questions, and then ask you to describe both the academic and social aspects of your transfer experience.

Background questions:

Did you grow up in Virginia?

Where did you go to high school?

What were your plans when you graduated form high school?

Did you attend other colleges prior to LCC?

When and why did you enroll in LCC?

Did you attend full or part-time?

Did you live at home?

Did you receive an associate degree from LCC?

What made you want to transfer to SU? Did you apply to other colleges? Was this a goal before you started attending LCC?

Were you working while you were at LCC?

What is your major at SU?

What are your goals after graduating from SU?

What kinds of interactions did you have with SU before you actually transferred?

How did LCC prepare you for the transfer process? Was it enough?

Introductory questions:

Before I ask you specific questions about your transfer experience at SU, could you give me a general description of your first semester? How was it different than you expected?

Did you participate in orientation? Could you briefly describe the activities you took part in and your impression of the whole orientation process?

Academic Experiences:

How is SU different from LCC as far as academics are concerned? (class size, tests, assignments, writing)

How is the classroom atmosphere different at SU than LCC? (especially student interactions)

How are the teachers different at SU than LCC? Did these differences cause difficulties for you?

Did your GPA change in your first semester at SU?

What do you attribute your change in GPA to?

Do you feel that LCC prepared you academically for SU?

How would you describe your progress towards graduation? Do you intend to graduate, and if so, are you on track to do so?

Describe your experience with your advisor at LCC as compared to SU?

I am also interested in computer literacy of cc transfer students. Did you use a computer while at LCC for e-mail, course assignments, Internet?

Did you have any trouble becoming familiar with the computer system at SU?

Social Experiences:

How do you feel about the social environment at SU? How much of your social life involves SU?

What is your impression of students at SU compared to LCC?

Have you found it easy or difficult to make friends at SU?

Do you feel like you are a part of SU?

Do you feel there is a social stigma associated with attending and transferring from a community college? How is this stigma manifested?

Describe your living situation.

Describe your life outside of class. What activities do you participate in outside of class?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What is the worst experience you have had at SU, and what is the best experience you have had at SU?

If I were an administrator at SU, what recommendations would you have for making the transition easier for community college transfer students at SU?

If you had to repeat your transfer experience, what would you do different?

What advice would you have for a person who was about to transfer from LCC to SU?

If you had it to do over again, would you attend a community college, or would you enter a four-year college as a freshman?

Are you satisfied overall with your transfer experience?

APPENDIX B

Sample SACQ Questions

Academic Adjustment Questions:

I have been keeping up to date on my academic work.

I am finding academic work at college difficult.

I am satisfied with the number and availability of courses at college.

Social Adjustment Questions:

I have been feeling lonely a lot at college recently.

I am meeting as many people and making as many friends as I would like at college.

I feel I am very different from other students at college in ways I don't like.

Personal-Emotional Adjustment Questions:

I am experiencing a lot of difficulty coping with the stress imposed upon me by college.

I have been in good health lately.

Being on my own, taking responsibility for myself, has not been easy.

Attachment Questions:

I wish I were at another college or university.

I find myself giving considerable thought to taking time off from college and finishing later.

I expect to stay at college for a bachelor's degree.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Agreement

Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: Transition Experiences of Community College Transfer Students
Researcher: Patricia Harrison, Ph.D. Candidate, Curry School of Education
Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to create a detailed picture of the process of transfer from a community college to a four-year institution from a student's perspective, and suggest ways to improve the process should students report specific difficulties in their transfer experience.

What you will do in the study:
You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher in which you discuss your transfer experience. With your permission, this interview will be audio taped. In addition, you will also be asked to complete a Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ).

Time Required:
The length of the interview will vary from participant to participant based on each participant's individual experiences, but in general it should last between one hour and two hours. The SACQ will take about twenty minutes to fill out. It can be done at the participant's leisure and mailed to the researcher.

Risks:
There are no anticipated risks.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study.

Confidentiality:
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your name will not be used in any report. You will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used with all information from your interview and your SACQ. The list connecting your name to the pseudonym will be kept under lock and key in the researcher's home. When the study is completed and the data analyzed, this list will be destroyed. With your permission, the

interview will be audio taped. When the study is completed and the data analyzed, this tape will be erased.

Voluntary participation:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study:
You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study:
If you wish to withdraw from the study either before, during, or after the interview, please contact either the researcher or her advisor (see below). The interview session is designed to be informal. If for any reason you wish to stop the interview while in progress, you may do so by asking the interviewer to end the interview. The questionnaire will be returned by mail to the researcher. If you do not wish to complete the questionnaire, simply refrain from returning it to the researcher.

Payment:
You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Who to contact if you have questions about this study:
The researcher is Patricia Harrison, Department of Leadership, Foundations and Policy, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Telephone: (804) 320-5865.

You may also contact the researcher's thesis advisor: Dr. Jay Chronister, Department of Leadership, Foundations, and Policy, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Telephone: (804) 924-0733.

Who to contact about your rights in this study:
Dr. Luke Kelly, Chairman, Institutional Review Board for the Behavioral Sciences, 287 Ruffner Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22903. Telephone: (804) 924-3606

Agreement:
I agree to participate in the research study described above.

Signature:_____ Date_____

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Address to which transcript should be mailed:

_____

_____

APPENDIX D

Results of SACQ Administration Converted to T Scores

Results of SACQ Administration Converted to T Scores					
Student	Academic Adjustment	Social Adjustment	Personal/ Emotional Adjustment	Attachment	Full Scale
Alice	58	38	43	47	45
Beth	49	39	54	48	46
Brandy	56	46	56	50	56
Christiana	58	59	53	53	59
Darby	58	38	40	43	45
Dennis*	-	-	-	-	-
Jared	57	49	49	47	51
Julie	44	52	56	51	51
Kate	58	51	69	59	60
Matt	43	45	58	46	47
Sarah	51	36	46	44	45
Sheila	70	46	64	59	62
Mean	54.73	45.36	53.45	49.73	51.55
Standard Deviation	7.63	7.16	8.68	5.42	6.61

*Note: Dennis did not return his SACQ to the researcher.